U.P. Rajarshi Tandon Open
University, Prayagraj

MAEN-119
New Literatures In English

Block

1

INTRODUCTION

Course Introduction

Block Introduction

UNIT 1
Naming the Discipline 5

UNIT 2
African Literature: Culture and Post-Nationalist Politics in Kenya and Nigeria 16

UNIT 3
Caribbean Literature: The Aesthetic of Diaspora 28

UNIT 4
South Asian Literature 44

UNIT 5
Australian Literature: Interrogating National Myths 60

UNIT 6
Canadian Literature: Scanning the Literary Landscape 69

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION NEW ITTERATE RESIN ENGLISH

In this Block you will be reading a selection of texts from various genres - proetry fiction and drama—giving a representative sample of the diverse Literatures in English. These texts, authored by writers from regions such as Africa, the Caribbean, South Asia, Australia and Canada, will help you to get an idea of the increasingly important field of study variously known as Commonwealth Literature, New Literatures in English and more recently Postcolonial Literature. You might ask why these, and not other equally representative texts, were chosen. Their accessibility, critical opinion determining their 'value' and the availability of critical material on them were some of the criteria kept in mind. So, in a sense, these works constitute a 'canon' of the field. We shall examine this and other issues in the 6 Units, structured as follows.

Unit One discusses the emergence of the field, changes in its nomenclature, modes of analysis and theoretical approaches. Culture and post-nationalist politics as reflected in African literature with special reference to Kenya and Nigeria is taken up in **Unit Two**. Caribbean writing inhabiting the space between cultures epitomising hybridity is explored in **Unit Three**. Questions of national identity brought home due to political instability are the subject of **Unit Four** which is on South Asian Literature. Australian literature endorsing as well as critiquing national myths is dealt with in **Unit Five**. **Unit Six** on Canadian Literature takes up issues of territories and their settlement with reference to Canada as a settler colony.

The best way to go through this block is to read it in conjunction with the texts prescribed in the course. The units have been structured with certain intersections in mind. For instance, Africa and South Asia have had an impact on the Caribbean in social, cultural and linguistic terms, hence the unit on Caribbean literature is placed between those on African and South Asian literatures Both Canada and Australia are settler colonies so the units on Canadian and Australian literatures are placed consecutively. The introductory unit is meant to provide a framework within which to 'locate' the plethora of literary traditions explicated in this block.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

NEW LITERATURES IN ENGLISH (MEG-08)

Welcome to the course *New Literatures in English*. This is one of the optional courses of MA English and contains prose, poetry and drama.

In the past few decades there has been a significant emergence of literatures other than those of Britain and the United States along with a significant growth of interest in such literatures and in their tremendous vitality and variety.

Through this course we aim to familiarize you with some of the major new literatures, through a study of significant works and seek to illustrate the richness, similarities and differences of these "new" literatures by relating them to developments in critical theory.

It would also be our objective to show how the historical, social and political pressures characterize these literatures and how ethnic contexts influence them.

The Block wise break-up is as follows:

Block I	Introduction		
Block II	(AFRICA)	Ngugi Wa Thiong'o	*A Grain of Wheat*
Block III	(AFRICA)	Wole Soyinka	*A Dance of the Forests*
Block IV	(SOUTH ASIA)	Bapsi Sidhwa	*Ice-Candy Man*
Block V	(CARIBBEAN)	V.S. Naipaul	*A House for Mr.Biswas*
Block VI	(CARIBBEAN)	Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite	*Poetry*
Block VII	(AUSTRALIA)	Patrick White	*The Solid Mandala*
Block VIII	(CANADA)	Margaret Laurence	*The Stone Angel*

The poems that we have included in this course have been printed in the Block itself. However, you will have to buy the drama and the novels prescribed or read them at your study centre libraries.

Let me impress upon you that there is no substitute for reading the texts prescribed and you should not be under the impression that these blocks stand by themselves. So do buy your books now and go through all the texts.

Happy Reading!

UNIT 1 NAMING THE DISCIPLINE

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Framing Commonwealth Literature
  1.2.1 Origins
  1.2.2 Critiques
  1.2.3 Continued Usage
1.3 Apparent Newness, Underlying Continuity
  1.3.1 Defining Newness
  1.3.2 Variants of Newness
  1.3.3 Contentious Concerns
1.4 Enabling Postcolonial Engagement
  1.4.1 Political Theory/Theoretical Politics
  1.4.2 Textual/Revolutionary Oppositionality
  1.4.3 Diasporic Intellectuals and High Theory
1.5 Let Us Sum Up
1.6 Questions
1.7 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to define 'New Literatures in English'. You may have heard of Courses in Commonwealth Literature, Postcolonial Literature and New Literatures in English. What do these different categories mean? How are they different and how far do they overlap? What bearing do social, economic and political forces have on the construction of these categories? These are some of the questions that we will address in the course of our discussion in this Unit.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

> A language that is not renewed, that does not develop, can easily die. English at the moment is being enriched by the new usages of overseas writers. But this is not why one reads Narayan or Khushwant Singh of India, Soyinka or Achebe of Nigeria, Patrick White or A.D. Hope of Australia, Janet Frame or Dan Davin of New Zealand, A.M. Klein or Earle Birney of Canada, Itrait Husain or Zulfikar Ghose of Pakistan, Edgar Mittelholzer or Sam Selvon of the Caribbean, or any other of the excellent writers now writing throughout the Commonwealth. True, one reads them because they tell us about the way their countries are evolving; true, one reads them because they enrich our pleasure in the English language, but in the cold light of judgement one reads them for the supranational qualities in their work. One reads them because they bring new ideas, new interpretations of life to us. One reads them, in short, because they are good writers. The standards of judgement are not national standards. Standards of the critic must be cosmopolitan; only the best should be praised.
> Norman Jeffares Lecture delivered to members
> of the Commonwealth Literature from
> 9-12 September 1964 at the University of Leeds.)

That the study of literatures in English produced by non-British authors was valued, ever since it originated out of the cross-cultural contact between the colonisers and the colonised has not always been true: For example, Edmund Gosse's valuation of a

volume of Toru Dutt's poetry from its unattractive appearance: "A hopeless volume it seemed, with its queer type, published at Bhowanipore, printed at the Sapthikasambad Press!" (qtd. In Narasimhaiah, 1978:xv). Gosse, the nineteenth century novelist, poet, biographer and critic reinforces the attitudes of English men of letters who judged works originating out of peripheral colonial territories like India in this negative manner. Once he opens the "hopeless" looking volume he is amazed at the quality of Dutt's poetry, open to British influence but reflective of the local setting. From the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, certain factors contributed towards an interest in the study of literature from the erstwhile colonies, many of whom had gained or were shortly to gain independence around this time. These together with the UK comprised the British Commonwealth Association of nations differing greatly amongst themselves and yet linked by strong political, social, economic, cultural and linguistic ties arising out of a shared, albeit varying, colonial experience. One of these was the creation of an English-educated intelligentsia who, by the very nature of their training, were steeped in European traditions of dissemination and assimilation of knowledge. This does not mean that they accepted it uncritically but it does imply that, at least in some cases, the choice of a language for conveying their ideas carried a cultural baggage which was difficult to get rid of.

The writers mentioned by Jeffares all belong to the class just described. The works they produce not only reflect or "tell us about the way their countries are evolving" but also critique and question it. So not only do they provide vivid accounts of local colour in a language inflected with those localisms which "enrich" English, but rather they create a "linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world" and is different from a "standard code, English" (Ashcroft *et al*, 1988:8) (Please note the use of english with a small 'e'—an english spoken by non-natives and part of what has been called 'World Englishes', This is different from English with a capital 'E' and spoken by native-speakers of the language). The distinctiveness of these works contributes to the thematic, linguistic and formal diversity of what came to be called New Literatures in English. The authors listed by Jeffares (notice all of them are male, except Janet Frame) constitute a 'canon' of sorts. There is a debate on what makes works worthy enough to be included in the 'canon,' what are the parameters adopted for judging their work, can any implications be drawn from what is excluded from the canon, is the latter to do with literary or extra-literary reasons. It is in taking cognizance of these and related concerns that the term Postcolonial is useful, particularly since most recent theorisations about literatures from the Commonwealth countries prefer to use this term.

1.2 FRAMING COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE

1.2.1 Origins

When tracing a chronology of events leading up to the establishment of Commonwealth Literature as a discipline it is common to ascribe the beginnings to universities in the United Kingdom. In the 1950s some courses in American, Commonwealth, Irish, and African literatures were offered in "a few provincial UK universities." The value judgement implied in the word "provincial" is unmistakable and it is no wonder that Dennis Walder, from whose account of the Commonwealth project this phrase is taken, should also denigrate other formerly colonial countries for including "little clusters of 'local' texts . . . into the syllabuses of English Departments . . . often with patronizing disclaimers" (1998:61). Walder's survey gives a new turn to the disjuncture between the metropolis and the periphery, the former usually taken to refer to the origin/centre of colonial power and the latter the regions over whom that power was exercised and continues to be exercised in neo-colonial forms. Thus if London was the metropolitan centre then countries in Asia or Africa colonised by the British were the outposts or the periphery of the British empire. The former is typified as cosmopolitan and the latter as provincial is colonial

discourse. You might wonder how this applies to academia and the beginnings of Commonwealth Literature. I am suggesting that such typifications are also read into Western academia which one might suppose would be characterised as uniformly metropolitan from a certain perspective. As Walder's use of the word "provincial" and his view of local texts included in syllabi at the University of Cape Town in South Africa indicates, the centre of Commonwealth literary studies lay elsewhere. Indeed he glorifies the first school of Commonwealth Literature founded at Leeds University in 1964 where "some of the best [works] found their way onto the Leeds syllabus" (Walder, 1998:62). Peripheral origins in other universities in the U.K. are not listed by Walder. Hence it is useful to have another view of the origins as given by Anna Rutherford in the Foreword to a collection of essays on the field arising out of a conference held at Aarhus University in Denmark. Rutherford perceptively pre-empts the question which might be asked "'What business have the Danes with the Commonwealth?'" The answer lies in the founding of possibly the first Institute of Commonwealth Literature at Aarhus in 1958 by Professor Greta Hort (Rutherford, 1972:7).

I have given these two instances of the institutional-temporal origins of Commonwealth Literature to point out how institutions are instrumental in determining new areas of study. But that academic curricula are influenced by political, social and economic factors is also borne out in the case of Commonwealth Literature becoming an object of study in the 1950s and 1960s. Many erstwhile colonised countries gained their independence at this time. India and Pakistan emerged as nations in 1947, Nigeria and Kenya in 1960 and 1963 respectively, the West Indian federation was formed in 1960. In Walder's view the literary and cultural expression of "nationalist strivings" during the process of decolonization produced writings in English which had a major impact internationally (1998:59-60). This can be one reason for their inclusion in university curricula in the U.K. But it is also useful to remember that post-war Britain, especially the 1950s and 1960s, experienced a large scale arrival of migrants belonging to its former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. While this produced hysterical political responses like the Immigration Act of 1968 as a strategy for excluding non-white settlers from any sense of national belonging, it also served as an opportune moment for appropriating 'black' cultural production under the term Commonwealth Literature.

1.2.2 Critiques

It is an accepted form of critical scholarship that concepts and terms which become dated are held up to interrogation. This is what has happened in the case of 'Commonwealth Literature.' At the time when the term gained currency the U.K. had a powerful international presence, not the least because it had been the single largest colonial power till about a decade or so before the 1960s, and its former colonies had recently come together under the umbrella Commonwealth. Even within this contradictions abound. In an essay entitled "'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist" Salman Rushdie observes, "South Africa and Pakistan, for instance, are not members of the Commonwealth, but their authors apparently belong to its literature. On the other hand, England, which, as far as I'm aware, has not been expelled from the Commonwealth quite yet, has been excluded from its literary manifestation" (1991:62). Rushdie's characteristic flippancy should not obscure the seriousness of his purpose in commenting on the naively political origins of literary labels with limited efficacy.

As early as 1970 William Walsh, appointed as professor to the first Chair of Commonwealth Literature at the University of Leeds, commented on his usage of the term in a book length study of selected Indian, African, Caribbean, Australian, New Zealand and Canadian authors. Walsh professes an awareness that it "may be objected to by those who take a more exact political view of the Commonwealth than I take here." Writers, he feels, may wish to see themselves as arising out of a particular "historical tradition" and "national context" and not as contributors to the literature of an "amorphous Commonwealth" (1970:10). Almost twenty years later

the conception of this amorphousness is contemptuously phrased thus, "this bunch of upstarts, huddling together under this new and badly made umbrella" (Rushdie, 1991:63). I am suggesting that the amorphousness of the concept, leading to confusion as to what can or cannot be included under this label, is the least serious objection which can be raised against it. Remember that most of the Commonwealth countries derive many aspects of their political, legal and educational systems from the British model. The similarities between the British and Indian legal systems are a case in point. So when the term is adopted for the literatures of these countries it implies as if even the forms of cultural expression derive from and are assessed by conceptual and critical models originating in a country formerly exercising control over, but now supposedly on an equal footing with independent nations. The easy appropriation of the 'common' literary 'wealth' of these nations by the British academia can be critiqued on these grounds.

A celebratory view of 'Commonwealth Literature' and wholesale approbation of the two words in conjunction is taken by that veteran of Commonwealth literary studies in India, C.D. Narasimhaiah. This is evinced in statements like the following: "The Commonwealth offers possibilities for an intelligent meeting of the East and the West . . ." (Narasimhaiah, 1978:xxix). The hierarchization implicit in this meeting which was the direct consequence of colonisation leading to imposition of the English language in countries now part of the Commonwealth as well as the irony inherent in the nomenclature of this political body are issues not taken into account. In a more recent work Narasimhaiah uses a phrase of Chinua Achebe's to label Commonwealth Literature "the heirloom of . . . [a] multiple heritage" (1995:25). It can be argued that the "heritage" spoken of here was imposed rather than inherited in most cases. There is a hierarchization implicit in this imposition which means that Commonwealth Literature is "positioned *below* English literature 'proper' . . . or . . . places English Literature at the centre and the rest of the world at the periphery" (Rushdie, 1991:66). Recall the concept of the centre and the periphery which I explained in the section titled 'Origins' and try and understand Rushdie's statement in the context of the academia. Valourisation of Commonwealth Literature does not obscure the fact that literature falling within this rubric is still considered a category within English Literature with most British universities offering a token selection of texts comprising a study of this area.

1.2.3 Continued Usage

From the sustained critical assaults on the term I have outlined in the previous section it would be natural for you to assume that the term has now passed out of usage. However, this is hardly the case as the title of C.D. Narasimhaiah's book *Essays in Commonwealth Literature: Heirloom of a Multiple Heritage* published in 1995 indicates. Even with an awareness of the political and cultural problematics it continues to be used although with a greater degree of self-reflexivity. I shall cite a few instances of this. When the first conference on the field was held in 1964 one of the recommendations made was that a journal of Commonwealth literature including critical articles and annual biographies should be established (Press, 1965:214). This led to *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* edited by Arthur Ravenscroft of South African origin. The journal is well into its third decade of publication and is a useful source of information about recent literary and critical publication from the various Commonwealth countries.

My other example is the international body Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS). The success of the Leeds Conference, which has already been discussed in some detail, led to the formation of the ACLALS which organised its first conference in Brisbane, Australia in 1968 on the theme of national identity. Its second conference focussed on literature of the West Indies and was held in 1971. The body organises a triennial conference and has regional branches affiliated to it such as India-ACLALS, South Pacific-ACLALS and European-ACLALS. Significantly the theme for the 12th triennial conference to be held in July 2001 in Canberra, Australia is 'Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the

Commonwealth.' One of the questions to be debated in this conference is how have "recent theoretical perspectives confirmed or challenged notions of a Commonwealth, and Commonwealth writing." What is this symptomatic of? I would say that it is in the spirit of combative engagement that a body like the ACLALS question its very founding principle while also adhering to it.

1.3 APPARENT NEWNESS, UNDERYING CONTINUITY

1.3.1 Defining Newness

Commonwealth literary studies, as explained in the previous section, took as their object of study literatures of the newly independent nations. Colonisation in one form or the other was responsible for the use of English in these regions which already had an established tradition of orature/literature in languages other than English. Thus the English language literature produced was a "new" addition to the body of literature already existing in various languages in countries like India, Kenya, Nigeria, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. However, this is not how the newness of such literature is perceived. As in the term 'Commonwealth Literature' the assimilationist model is at work in the term 'New Literatures in English.' Indeed when discussing the former Rushdie voiced the suspicion that quite possibly it "is no more than an ungainly term for the younger English literatures" (1987:65-66). When assimilated into the existing body of English literature, seen as the repository of universal human values, the new or younger literatures in English are perceived as "enriching" or invigorating it. Let us see what forms such a critical stance has taken in explicatory studies using this phrase or variants of it.

Bruce King in his introduction to *Literatures of the World in English* acknowledges that there are "different national literary traditions with values and histories of their own" but that "each literature is a part of world English literature, and shares in the heritage of British writing" (1974:20-21). King's liberal humanist critical stance fails to mask the contradictions inherent in the above formulation. If each literary tradition reflects its own "values" then clearly the heritage of British writing will have values markedly different from other national literary traditions, not the least because a different set of material and political conditions are constitutive of it. Thus the "nostalgia" for a "long-established English tradition" which King sees expressed in the various national literatures is not simply an "ideal of a more ordered, settled, complex society" as he assumes (1974:20). The inculcation of this ideal and appreciation of the literature reflective of it was part of the colonial agenda, to form "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect," as Macaulay put it in his *Minute on Indian Education*. Having outlined the problems in King's critical formulations on the newly emerged literatures in English it must be said that his definition of it is nothing if not inclusive. I am citing it in detail so that you can contrast it with other, more selective, definitions:

> A new English literature may express a culture which has grown up with the settler communities, it may be a continuation of indigenous cultural traditions, or it may be some mixture of the effects of colonization, including the bringing together of various races into one nation.
>
> (King, 1974:2)

In a later work entitled *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World* published in 1980 King focussed on literatures from six countries—Nigeria, India, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the West Indies and on authors from each of these.

Recent European publications using the concept of newness proffer other, less inclusive, definitions. Terminological inconsistency too abounds as in a work edited by M.T. Bindella and G.V. Davis entitled *Imagination and the Creative Impulse in* the New Literatures in English published under Rodopi's 'Cross/Cultures Readings

in Post/colonial Literatures in English' series. While the collection includes readings of African, Indian, Canadian and Australian texts and literatures, the editors are firm about what constitutes New Literatures:

> From the European perspective at least, the new literatures in English deal with "new" countries where new immigrant populations have settled and new national identities have come into existence. The new literatures thus reflect *par excellence* the historical processes by which such societies have been created and the development of consciousness through which new lands have been inscribed in the collective imagination of emerging countries.
>
> (Bindella, 1993:5)

Thus the literatures of Nigeria, India and Zimbabwe are discussed because they are "new" nations and those of Australia, Canada, New Zealand because they have been populated by "new" immigrants. The West Indies fits both categories since not only does its population comprise those who are immigrants but also because it has recently become a nation, or rather, a federation of nationalities. The focus on new lands "inscribing" themselves on the imagination of emerging countries makes the emphasis on Canadian, Australian and New Zealand literature inevitable which is why, in my opinion, this is a less inclusive definition than King's.

1.3.2 Variants of Newness

European critics have tried to pull Commonwealth Literature and New Literatures in English away from being a mere "supplement to British Literature. One of the reports read out at a symposium on 'Imagination and the Creative Impulse in New Literatures in English' called for "a new integral model of organisation which would take account of the comparative, contextual and multicultural aspects of the subject, thus accommodating the New Literatures in a reformed structural pattern of International English Literature" (Bindella, 1993:11). This structural pattern is free of the associations of assimilation and hierarchization implied by the already critiqued nomenclature. Not only is it flexible enough to include English-language literature from countries not falling within the Commonwealth umbrella but also chosen to highlight the possible interconnections between the literatures of various nations (inter-national).

This is the purpose of another recent collection of essays initially read out at a conference of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS) on the theme 'Nationalism vs. Internationalism. Subtitled '(Inter) National Dimensions of Literatures in English' it sees these literatures as a form of globalisation (Zach, 1996:xiv). In the same collection Bruce King's essay uses the globalised American cultural model mentioned in the Introduction to make the facile generalisation that "Commonwealth literature is itself multicultural: an overseas colony is by nature multicultural. . . . Multiculturalism is as much Nigerian, West Indian, Malaysian or Indian as North American, European or Australian" (1996:15). Taken in a loose sense this is true but it obscures the power relations operating between different cultural groups in the countries listed, in some of which race is a determining factor. Neither in society nor in literature does the parity which is assumed to underlie multiculturalism operate as it is ideally meant to. King is aware of this and to theorise the contestatory relations in a multicultural Commonwealth he uses the American model of the "cultural wars in the United States" (1996:16). What is disturbing is the unifying force he attributes to the English language as a medium of communication which can resolve the intra- and inter-national problems in both multicultural nations like Nigeria and India and a multicultural body like the Commonwealth (King, 1996:15).

In discussing these variants of "newness" my purpose has been to prepare the ground for a political versus non-political stance in the area variously described as Commonwealth Literature or New Literatures in English. Some aspects of this stance are scrutinised briefly in the next section.

1.3.3 Contentious Concerns

I have dwelt at length on the variation of the term discussed so far. This section is about the overlapping set of concerns addressed by commentators preferring to align themselves with either of the two: Commonwealth literary studies or the study of New Literatures in English. Let me begin by pointing out their convergences as well as divergences on the role and function of literature. The newly emergent literatures should aspire to develop "supranational qualities" since good writing possesses "human and universal qualities" (Jeffares, 1965:xviii); they are the best means of "pooling the resources of many cultures . . . and of breaking the national barriers so as to make them available to all of us in the hope of supplementing each others deficiencies and correcting the warps" (Narasimhaiah, 1978:xxxi). Literature as the bearer of universal values and serving as a means of the betterment of the human condition is a liberal humanist view which became outmoded once it was accepted that literature is not a pure entity uncontaminated by the political, the social and material modes of production. Jeffares and Narasimhaiah's statements would lead one to believe that the best kind of Commonwealth literature is that which is ideologically neutral. More recent commentators, even while pointing out the dangers of "universalism," fall into the same trap while discussing the works of "Third-World" writers. The study of these, according to Zach and Goodwin, "counteracts feelings of superiority, dispels stereotyped notions about other nations, broadens too narrow aesthetic views, and inspires respect for people of a different creed and colour and for their cultural achievements" (1996:xiv). This, as is apparent, accords criticism a transparency and idealism which is as fallacious as the idea of a lack of a political stance in literature.

However even this political stance has not been without its attendant problems. Literatures falling under the rubrics discussed so far have been valued, or in the opinion of some, like Rushdie, overvalued, because of the nationalist politics they convey. As expressions of anti-colonial nationalist consciousness they have been "ghettoised" under either Commonwealth Literatures or New Literatures in English. One of the rules for life inside the 'ghetto', is that "literature is an expression of nationality" (Rushdie, 1987:66). A recognition of this is apparent in recent criticism such as King's writings on the Commonwealth novels where he states explicitly that those novels which use "representative characters for a national or racial allegory" have won international acclaim (1991:6). Not only does this lead to an ignorance of the other influences, besides anti-colonial resistance, which go into the making of these literatures, but also this focus on national allegories written in English serves to obfuscate the validity of literature written in the local languages, whose concerns may converge and/or diverge from the former. As you can see both the valuation of literatures for their supernational, universal characteristics as well as for their representation of nationalistic concerns are contentious concerns. This leads either to the adoption of New Critical methodologies for analysis or to overtly political, but covertly essentialist, form of categorising and critiquing literary production in the countries under discussion.

What kind of literature from these countries gets read internationally, by whom and in what ways depends on the expression of nationality. Gordon Collier questions the assumptions which make both critics and readers choose certain texts above others which are "more internationalist in their origins and less obviously rooted in the more conspicuous determinants of place" (Bindella, 1993:8). These works then come to constitute a canon of Commonwealth Literature or New Literatures in English which in itself is a paradox of sorts since the inclusion of these literatures within English Literature was, at least in some senses, intended to broaden the horizons of what was seen as limited and insular. The selective principle involved in choosing the best that has been known and thought in the Commonwealth is perceived as a "problem" by Norman Jeffares since it is difficult to decide "what novels one would wish more people to read, as 'touchstones' perhaps, as the equivalent of anthology poems" (1972:10). You may be aware that when Matthew Arnold spoke of "touchstones" he referred to the best literary works ever produced. A new work could be compared

with these classics to determine its value. The reference to Matthew Arnold's touchstone method of criticism underlines the need to contain the study of these relatively new literatures within the critical and institutional framework of the study of English literature, an enterprise in which Arnold played a pivotal role. To historicise the introduction of Western forms of knowledge, a specific discipline of which was the study of English language and literature, to study its impact on the minds of the colonised, the kinds of resistance it engendered and its continuing effect on these societies after their emergence as independent nation-states, are some areas of study. Let us deal with some of these and related objectives under another term in the next section.

1.4 ENABLING POSTCOLONIAL ENGAGEMENT

1.4.1 Political Theory/Theoretical Politics

> The semantic basis of the term 'post-colonial' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. It has occasionally been employed in some earlier work in the area to distinguish between the periods before and after independence ('colonial period' and 'post-colonial period'), for example, in constructing national literary histories, or in suggesting comparative studies between stages in those histories. . . . We use the term 'post-colonial,' however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted.
>
> (Ashcroft *et al*, 1989:2)

The quotation given above is from *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* which made post-colonial the catchphrase in academic circles. I have quoted from it at length to indicate that the authors of this book, although aware that the term has been used previously ("occasionally been employed") in other kinds of discourse, appropriate it for a cross cultural discussion of literary texts to which they give the grand name "cross-cultural criticism." It is this literary-cultural postcoloniality which Aijaz Ahmad takes issue with when he points out that the first major debate on the idea of postcolonialism was initiated in 1972 by Hamza Alvi's article "The State in Postcolonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh" which appeared in *New Left Review*. When the term came to be used in the 1980s, Ahmad observes, it was with no memory that it has originated "not in cultural theory but in political theory, with the object of inquiry at that time being not 'post-colonial literature' or the 'postcolonial intellectual' but the 'postcolonial state'" (1995:280-81). The depoliticizing of the term and its use to label periods, authors, texts and intellectuals, has resulted in the containment of literature and its criticism from the social, political and material processes which influence it. Only one of these processes, colonialism and only one of its effects, discursivity is the object of attention in a de-politicized literary and cultural usage of postcolonial theory. This is why reservations have been expressed against what Ashcroft *et al* call, "a continuity of preoccupations" in the "culture" (notice the singular) "affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day." Among others Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge have called for an "adequate materialist theory of postcolonialism" which can take into account how colonialism variously affected different cultures (1994:285). The account given by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* from the moment of colonization to the present day was ruptured decisively at various points when the former colonies became independent and hence it has also been suggested that the terms "neo-colonial" and "post-independence" are probably more suitable.

A sustained engagement with the term has led to a doing away with its hyphenated form (post-colonial) and adoption of the unhyphenated term (postcolonialism) as more reflective of the continued operation of the material, social and linguistic forms of colonialism in politically independent countries. Please do not think that the critiques take away the efficacy of the term postcolonial. On the contrary it is only when a discipline is critiqued that it can remedy the lacunae which creep in due to inadequate or selective theorisations like the discursive approach to postcolonialism taken by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*. Judged by any standards this is an important book for readers of postcolonial literatures, but it needs to be supplemented by other readings, some of which have already been suggested.

1.4.2 Textual/Revolutionary Oppositionality

One of the foundational texts of postcolonial theory is Edward Said's brilliant account of the construction of the Orient by Western discourse. In Said's words, European culture "was able to manage—and even produce-the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period . . ." (1995:3). Said's work is part of what has now come to be called colonial discourse analysis. In directing attention to the discursive production of meanings, Orientalism is seen as representing "the first phase of postcolonial theory" (Gandhi, 1999:64). This textual oppositionalism can be compared and contrasted with that of Frantz Fanon. Fanon gives a description of the phases which native cultural producers go through in their relation with the colonial culture: a period of "unqualified assimilation," followed by a stage in which the native is disturbed and "decides to remember what he is," and finally "the fighting phase" in which he will "shake" the people. In the fifties and sixties Fanon wrote about native absorption of and opposition to the colonial culture as the Other with reference to Algeria and Haiti. This is a kind of oppositionality different from the one generated by Said's enterprise of diagnosing how the West absorbed and represented the Orient as the Other in the nineteen seventies.

In the work of the Kenyan activist and writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o there is an awareness about the materialist basis of textuality as well as a commitment to its revolutionary potential. To this end he has repeatedly pointed out the stereotypical depictions of Africa, its environs and its people by imperialist writers like Rudyard Kipling, Rider Haggard, Elspeth Huxley and others. In addition, he counters such representations in his novels and criticism which focus on the struggles of the proletariat against their colonial or neo-colonial masters. He has also called for an abolition of the English language and its literature and an adoption of African languages and literatures in the interest of forging a positive self-image of the African in a seminal work entitled *Decolonizing the Mind*. The promulgation of such ideas has not been without a price, Ngugi was held as a political detainee for a year in post-colonial Kenya and has now been living in exile for a good many years in New York. It is to this aspect of exile, also referred to as diasporic, that I will now turn.

1.4.3 Diasporic Intellectuals and High Theory

The career graphs of diasporic intellectuals like Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak attest to the institutionalisation of postcolonial theory in Western, particularly the U.S. academia. Their origins in the third world as well as their theorisations about their own positionality enable them to occupy a location which is comfortably marginal to the centre. In their own very different ways the members of this holy postcolonial trinity have drawn attention to figures ignored by high theory: the migrant at the interstices of cultures (Bhabha); the gendered subaltern (Spivak); the stereotyped oriental (Said). One of the frequent objections against this theoretical practice is its over-reliance on post-structuralist terminology and ideology with its focus on the decentering of meaning due to an inherent indeterminacy in discourse. For instance, in her most widely discussed essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak is self-reflexive about her role as the investigating academic whose object of inquiry is the female subaltern subject. It is no wonder then that given this hierarchization

the conclusion drawn is that the subaltern cannot speak, but one might add, that she is spoken for in the West by academic mediators like Spivak. This need not take away from the value of such theorisations, for they do deal with issues of race, gender, class and caste.

For many of their anti-imperialist critiques these theorists draw upon canonical texts by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, to name a few. In reading these works oppositionally to recover the suppressed voices in them, whether of migrants, natives or women, Spivak and Said add a new dimension to literary and critical representation. In this respect Bhabha's readings of works by Frantz Fanon, Toni Morrison, Derek Walcott and others can be seen as an attempt towards establishing an alternative postcolonial canon even though the aim is to dismantle canons.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

One of the issues touched upon in the three major divisions in this unit has been that of canonisation of authors and texts. Since we are dealing with literature, this focus was inevitable. However, I hope I have also been able to indicate that literature is not divorced from the social, political and economic context in which it originates. The terms 'Commonwealth' and 'Postcolonial' indicate these intersections. I have also tried to indicate that no longer can literature, criticism and theory be separated since literature is an ideological critique of society and much recent theory is creative. Although the section divisions may seem to indicate a progression from 'Commonwealth Literature' to 'New Literatures in English' to Postcolonial Literature' do remember that all three are currently in use. Finally, some of the predominant concerns only briefly touched upon in this unit such as history, nationalism, language, migrancy, ethnicity, feminism will be taken up in the subsequent units.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. On what grounds can the term 'Commonwealth Literature' be critiqued?

2. Analyse the term 'New Literatures in English' as a possible advance on 'Commonwealth Literature.'

3. What role have migrant intellectuals played in the institutionalisation of postcolonial theory?

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Commonwealth Literature

Jeffares, A. Norman (1965). 'Introduction' in John Press (ed.) *Commonwealth Literature: Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture*. London: Heinemann, xi-xviii.

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Narasimhaiah, C.D. (1995). 'Why Commonwealth Literature?' *Essays in Commonwealth Literature: heirloom of a Multiple Heritage*. New Delhi: Pencraft, 12-24.

Rushdie, Salman (1991). '"Commonwealth Literature" Does Not Exist' *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta-Viking Penguin, 61-70.

Rutherford, Anna (1972). 'Foreword' in A. Rutherford (ed.) *Commonwealth*. Aarhus: Aarhus UP, 7.

Walsh, William (1970). 'Preface' *A Manifold Voice: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*. London: Chatto and Windus, 9-10.

New Literatures in English

Bindella, M.T. and G.V. Davis (1993). 'Introduction' in M.T. Bindella and G.V. Davis (eds.) *Imagination and the Creative Impulse in New Literatures in English*. Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1-12.

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King, Bruce (1996). 'Thinking about Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Internationalism' in W. Zach and K.L. Goodwin (eds.) *Nationalism vs. Internationalism: (Inter)National Dimensions of Literatures in English*. Tubingen: Stauffenburg-Verl, 15-22.

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Postcolonial Theory and Criticism

Ahmad, Aijaz (1997). 'The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality' in P. Mongia (ed.) *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Delhi: OUP, 276-93.

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Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.) (1990). *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.

Fanon, Frantz (1990). *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington. Harmondsworth: Penguin. (original French edition 1961)

Mishra, Vijay and Bob Hodge (1991). 'What is Post(-) Colonialism?' in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds.). *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia Up, 276-90.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey.

Said, Edward (1991). *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. (original edition 1978)

Shohat, Ella (1993). 'Notes on the Post-colonial,' *Social Text* 31/32:99-113.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988). 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 271-813.

Walder, Dennis (1998). 'Theory,' *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 56-83.

UNIT 2 AFRICAN LITERATURE: CULTURE AND POST-NATIONALIST POLITICS IN KENYA AND NIGERIA

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 The Politics of Language
  2.2.1 Choosing Between English and Native Languages
  2.2.2 Swahili
  2.2.3 Kikuyu
2.3 Literature and Social Commitment
  2.3.1 Prose Writing in Kenya
  2.3.2 Theatre in Nigeria
2.4 The Writer in Africa
  2.4.1 Cultural and Political Assertion
  2.4.2 Censorship
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Questions
2.7 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to outline how cultural production in Africa has been directly affected by the choice of a particular language (English, Swahili Kikuyu, Igbo etc) as a means of education and how writers, particularly from Kenya and Nigeria, have responded to this choice. In the socially committed literature emerging from these nations the freedom of the writer has often sought to be curtailed. A brief survey of Yoruba theatre and Kenya prose writing is included in this unit with the aim of indicating how this literature both reflects and questions the structures established after independence, sometimes leading to the political persecution of the writers who dared to question. Please note that we will speak mostly of Kenya and Nigeria and not the rest of Africa as the texts prescribed in your course are Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* and Ngugi wa Thongo's *A Grain of Wheat.*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In any given time and place cultural production can take many forms all of which—music, dance, painting, sculpture, oral traditions, literature—are reflective of the social and historical processes in a society. In this unit I shall focus on the role literature, and the language it is written in, plays in African countries like Kenya and Nigeria when political independence has already been achieved. Let me begin by giving a brief account of the political situation in these countries in the years when they were under colonial control and immediately after they won their freedom from colonial rule. You will read in detail about the historical and political background in Blocks 2 and 3. Although British control over Kenya was established by the Berlin Conference in 1885, European settlers poured in only from 1895 onwards. Kenya became a British colony in 1920. The war of independence known as the Mau Mau war lasted from 1952 to 1960 leading to negotiations, which resulted in independence in 1963. Immediately after independence English was the official language in Kenya.

In 1974 Swahili replaced English as the official language in the wake of a process which had begun in 1969, when a constitutional amendment had instituted the use of Swahili in the National Assembly.

Let us now turn to Nigeria. Parts of the country which form Nigeria today were Protectorates under the British towards the end of the 19th century. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 and became a federal republic in 1963. Post-independence Nigeria has had a succession of military governments. Between 1967 and 1970 the eastern regions seceded from the republic in what came to be called the Nigerian Civil War. There are almost 400 indigenous languages in Nigeria. English and the main language of each state are the official languages. I think it should be obvious to you that once nationalist struggles in these countries achieved their political objective—independence—one of the most important post-nationalist concerns to emerge was the question of which language to adopt. I am suggesting that before this concern was taken up by writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka they had to conceptualise the role of the writer in postcolonial Kenya and Nigeria respectively. Both have dealt with this in talks which have been published and are now recognised as seminal theorisations. Soyinka's 'The Writer in a Modern African State' was an address delivered at the Afro-Scandinavian Writers' Conference, Stockholm, in 1960, shortly before the Nigerian Civil War. Ngugi's 'The Writer and His Past' and 'The Writer in a Changing Society' were in the form of a paper given to the Kenya Historical Association in 1968 and a speech delivered to Makerere extra-mural students at Tinja, Uganda, in 1969. Both Soyinka and Ngugi visualise the role of the writer in historical terms. The following quotations will help clarify the point I am making:

> The African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past. Of course, the past exists, the real African consciousness establishes this—the past exists now, this moment, it is co-existent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future, but it is not a fleshpot for escapist indulgence, and it is vitally dependent on the sensibility that recalls it.
>
> (Soyinka, 1993: 18-19)

> I believe the African novelist, the African writer. . . . must be committed on the side of the majority (as indeed he was during the anti-colonial struggle) whose silent and violent clamour for change is rocking the continent. By diving into himself, deep into the collective unconscious of his people, he can seek the root, the trend in the revolutionary struggle. He has already done something in restoring the African character to his history, to his past. But in a capitalist society, the past has a romantic glamour: gazing at it . . . is often a means of escaping the present. It is only in a socialist context that a look at yesterday can be meaningful in illuminating today and tomorrow. Whatever his ideological persuasion, this is the African writer's task.
>
> (Ngugi, 1972: 46)

Do you notice any similarities in the statements by Soyinka and Ngugi? **Firstly**, both agree that for the African writer to remain embedded in the past, whether it be a glorious vision of pre-colonial existence or the excesses of the colonial regime, is detrimental because it is "escapist." If the writer takes recourse to the past it should be in terms meaningful and relevant to the present. **Secondly**, what Soyinka, calls "the sensibility" of the author and Ngugi labels "the ideological persuasion" is responsible for how meaningful a role writers can play in the historical processes of which they are a part. And **finally**, if such a role involves serving as a "conscience" of society (Soyinka) by examining it in a "socialist" manner (Ngugi), how pertinent is it to the social, political and economic problems faced by many countries in Africa? This is not to imply that Soyinka and Ngugi have similar political orientations. Indeed one can label these positions as the right and the left respectively. However, this does not take away from my main point that both have tried to assign a socially

and culturally committed role to the African writer. As the next section will indicate, they have in very different ways, also addressed the question of language.

2.2 THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

2.2.1 Choosing Between English and Native Languages

It might surprise you to learn that unlike the situation in South Africa or Francophone Africa where languages like Afrikaans and French were, and in some cases continue to be, imposed on the native populations, the official policy in British Africa was to encourage instruction and education in indigenous languages. James Booth has pointed out that in the British colonies indigenous languages were employed in primary education, English becoming the exclusive language of instruction only at the secondary level. We shall look at this in the context of the promotion of literacy, modern education and creative writing in East and West Africa. The missionary societies taught reading and writing to those they wished to convert and procured vernacular translations of scriptural texts in the nineteenth century (Gerard, 1981: 173). In 1922 one such missionary society obtained financial support from the Phelps-Stokes fund for an enquiry into the educational systems in Africa. The enquiry commission proclaimed an "emphatic belief in the value of the Native languages" thus distancing themselves from the linguistic policies followed by the French and the Portuguese in their African territories. Given this report's declaration that "The processes of education must begin with the characteristics of the people as they are and help them to evolve to the higher levels" and the British governmental memorandum in 1925 specifying that "the study of the educational use of the vernaculars is of primary importance" (Gerard, 1981: 183) it seems as if the British government was involved in the noble mission of encouraging native languages.

Let us first take the case of Kenya. It is an indication of the confused aims of the British colonists that although the colonial government declared in 1929 that English should be the official language of Kenya, Swahili continued to be the language of instruction in schools, possibly because English was considered too powerful a "political tool" to be given to Africans. Only the Kikuyu Independent Schools proved an exception to these rules since in 1935 they decided to introduce English as the medium of instruction at all levels. In a surprising change in policy the 1950s saw the introduction of English at the primary level by the government. Shortly after independence, the Ominde report commissioned by the Kenyatta government saw in English the possibility of promoting "national unity" (Sicherman, 1990: 28) leading to widespread protests against its imposition.

What is the situation like in Nigeria? As in the other British colonies here too the official policy was one of promotion of vernacular languages and literatures. Whereas this policy was successful in the case of Yoruba language and literature leading to the appearance of original writing, both prose and poetry, during the first half of the twentieth century, it did not work as well among the Ibos, the other major linguistic groups in Nigeria. One of the most moving accounts of the linguistic dilemma Ibo writers find themselves in is provided by Chinua Achebe:

> I have always been fond of stories and intrigued by language—first Igbo and later English which I began to learn at about the age of eight. I don't know for certain but I probably have spoken more words in Igbo than English but I have definitely written more words in English than Igbo. Which I think makes me perfectly bilingual.
>
> (Achebe, 1973: 190)

An educational code had been promulgated in Nigeria in 1903, the first government secondary school was founded in 1911 and these combined with the influence of Henry Carr (1863-1965), the first Nigerian high official in educational matters, led to

the emergence of a literate class (Gerard, 1981: 247). That this class was fluently bilingual, as Achebe indicates with reference to himself, has been attributed to sociological and linguistic factors. Gerard suggests that the variety of Ibo dialects led to controversies over orthographies (spellings) and hence to the neglect of Ibo language and literature. Moreover, Ibo children, initially taught to read through the vernacular primary readers, were encouraged to read in English by their parents. English was seen as a means of acquiring positions of power in the governmental machinery (1981: 260). What Gerard fails to point out is something to which Achebe has obliquely drawn attention to in the essay 'Named for Victoria, Queen of England': if the missionaries used the vernacular languages for the spread of Christianity, they also introduced the native converts (like Achebe's family) to English literature through translations of the Bible, Christian hymns and works like *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This was also a factor in the Africans' desire to acquire the English language. This was despite efforts like the Nigerian 'National Policy in Education' (1977) which outlined the government's policy to encourage indigenous languages by advocating that each child should learn one of the three "major" languages apart from the mother tongue, the major languages recognised are: Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba.

Asserting the efficacy of one's own languages against an imposed one as a marker of cultural identity is a common anti-colonial strategy in nationalist politics. The British African colonial policy by and large supported the use of indigenous languages. This does not mean that no power and prestige came to be attached to English, rather a premium was attached to acquiring an English education. It is this mindset which writers like Ngugi and Soyinka are reacting against in the period following the nationalist struggle (postcolonial Kenya and Africa) when the hegemony of the colonial language still reigns supreme.

2.2.2 Swahili

To counter this hegemony the adoption of a common pan-African language has been proposed. As early as 1959 the Second Conference of Negro Writers and Artists which took place at Rome called for the choice of one African language which "would not necessarily belong to a relative majority of peoples" and that "All Africans would learn this national language besides their own regional language and the European language of secondary education," the latter would be optional. In addition "a team of linguists would be instructed to enrich this language . . . with the terminology necessary for the expression of modern philosophy, science and technology" (qtd. In Booth, 1981: 64). Recognising the importance of language as a constituent in "social programming" Soyinka has called for the adoption of a common African language which would do away with colonially imposed divisions. Read the following statement carefully and attempt to understand the relationship between culture and language:

> . . . attention must be called again to the fact that our present national boundaries are colonial, that the cultural orientation is therefore still predominantly colonial, that the linguistic boundary is even more critical than the geographical because it is culturally divisive, but also that to replace such boundaries with several nation-linguistic boundaries is to enshrine for all time the principle of colonial fragmentation.
>
> (Soyinka, 1993: 91)

To do away with these "nation-linguistic" boundaries Swahili is envisaged as an ideal choice because most of East and Central Africa already speaks and writes in this language. This will help in combating the cultural fragmentation which arose out of various African nations making a choice between European languages and the languages spoken within its boundaries. Having no common African languages to communicate in is perceived a serious handicap to African cultural (one might also add political and economic) solidarity.

Please do not assume that the project is not fraught with contradictions and difficulties in implementation. One of the most obvious of these is the enormous scholarship which would be involved in translating works from other African languages into Swahili for educational purposes. It is quite possible that the governments of many countries where Swahili is not used, such as Nigeria, would prove resistant to the idea for economic or cultural chauvinistic reasons. Countries like Kenya and Tanzania where Swahili is already an established language would be at an advantage and probably stand to gain more out of this proposal in cultural and linguistic terms. These are inequities which even the ideal of a pan-African cultural synthesis cannot wish away. Backed though it is by bodies like the Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, Union of Writers of the African Peoples, the All-Africa Teachers Union and authorities like Cheik Anta Diop and Wole Soyinka, the problems already outlined make its implementation difficult, if not impossible. No wonder then the adoption of Swahili as an African *lingua franca* has not materialised.

2.2.3 Kikuyu

The most ardent advocate of Kikuyu language and literature, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has often been criticized for his neglect of Swahili which is the national language of Kenya. Ngugi's championing of oral literature in Kikuyu is seen as a deliberate indifference to Swahili literature. Sicherman observes that objectively speaking Swahili literature both written and oral, in Kenya as well as in Tanzania, is by far the most dynamic branch of East African literature alive today. Hence Ngugi's neglect of the teaching of Swahili literature in the Department of Literature at Nairobi has been criticised (1990: 35). We will see whether this charge has any validity. In 1968 Ngugi and two of his colleagues called for the abolition of the English Department at the University of Nairobi. The new organising principle they proposed involved a study of Kenyan and East African literature, African literature, third world literature and literature from the rest of the world at what was named the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi (Ngugi, 1986: 94-5). In continuation with the same "Nairobi Literature Debate" the Dept. of Literature co-organised a conference on 'The Teaching of African Literature Kenyan Schools' at which one of the strongest recommendations made was: "A clear programme of Swahili literature be introduced and be made compulsory in schools . . . Swahili has a major and an increasing role to play in Kenya and needs to be given greater emphasis that it has hitherto been accorded" (Ngugi, 1986: 99). Ngugi's endorsement of this report indicates that the focus on his tribal language Kikuyu in his fictional and theoretical works does not necessarily imply a bias against Swahili which is the official language of Kenya.

I will now focus on Ngugi's views on literature as a means of cultural expression with reference to his native language, Kikuyu. In 1963, Obi Wali published a controversial article entitled 'The Dead End of African Literature' which Ngugi read prior to its publication in *Transition*. Wali's argument "that any true African literature must be written in African languages" and that "it is better for an African writer to think and feel in his own language" had a profound influence on Ngugi's own formulations on the issue (Sicherman, 1990: 28). Literature written in colonial languages is not African literature since it involves a "dissociation, divorce, or alienation from the immediate environment," an idea which becomes clearer when the colonial language is seen as "a carrier of culture" (Ngugi, 1986: 17). This is how he corelates the two:

> Language as communication and culture are . . . products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is

> thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.
>
> (Ngugi, 1986: 15-16)

Given this basic relationship between language and culture it is no wonder that Ngugi's choice of writing in his mother tongue Kikuyu is intended as a means of giving expression to the daily rhythms, social structures and struggles of the Kenyan people. He publicly rejected the English language in favour of Kikuyu in 1977 but had written and produced plays in Kikuyu since 1976. His plays were seen as subversive by the Kenyan government. Not only were they banned, they also led to Ngugi being put in prison for the year 1978. Despite political repercussions the use of Kikuyu for creative purposes has had a significant impact in Kenya. As Ngugi explains, his novel *The Devil on the Cross* written in Kikuyu was "received into the age old tradition of storytelling around the fireside" when groups of workers, families would gather together for readings from it (1986: 83). This marked the success of his agenda of reaching out to people in a language and idiom familiar to them, making literature not the elitist pursuit it was when it was written in the colonial language but socially relevant to the masses.

Writing in Kikuyu has not been an easy task for Ngugi. The language did not possess a significant tradition of novel or fiction writing. The existing Kikuyu orthography proved unsatisfactory for conveying certain sounds and tonal variations (Ngugi, 1986: 74-5). Despite these linguistic constraints and political persecution Ngugi's efforts at creating a significant body of literature in his native language are commendable. Hence it is all the more ironical that living in exile for over a decade now Ngugi has reverted back to using English, the colonial language he once rejected so vehemently.

2.3 LITERATURE AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT

2.3.1 Prose Writing in Kenya

Ngugi's writings are a case in point for the oft-made claim that among the various ethnic groups in Kenya, the Kikuyu who experienced the severest forms of racial, political and economic tensions, were "the most advanced tribe, with more educated members and a higher degree of political consciousness" (Hatch qtd. in Gerard, 1981: 309). Among those who sought to create a tradition of novel or fiction writing in the Kikuyu language, Ngugi has singled out Gakaara wa Wanjau who established a journal in the language. Having been imprisoned for writing in the language of the masses he kept a diary as a record for the years he spent in prison (1952-1962) which was later published as a book (Ngugi, 1986: 24, 74). That this writer's career has had a profound influence on Ngugi's should be apparent: like him Ngugi writes, or at least wrote, in Kikuyu besides having maintained a record of the one year he spent in a maximum security prison published as *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. However, Ngugi's educational training and early career also illustrate the fact that the Kikuyu were the first to recognize the advantage to be gained by adopting English. As early as 1938 Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* was the first book written by a Kikuyu to attract worldwide attention (Gerard, 1981: 309).

The most significant body of Kenyan prose writing in English has come from writers whose native language is Kikuyu. Many of the works written in the nineteen sixties and seventies deal with the Mau Mau movement and its aftermath. I will discuss a few of these novels of 'freedom' briefly. Some of these are Ngugi's *Weep not, Child* (1964), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Charity Waciuma's *Daughter of Mumbi* (1969), John Karoki's *The Land is Ours* (1970), Godwin Wachira's *Ordeal in the Forest* (1968) and Meja Mwangi's *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) and *Taste of Death* (1975). Critical opinion is divided on the depiction of this important event in Kenya's history.

On the one hand some of the fictional reconstructions, whose names have been listed, depict rural families caught in the crossfire between the Mau Mau guerilla forest fighters and the home guards or security forces who sought to control the 'violence' perpetrated by the former. On the other they find it hard to reconcile themselves to the brutal excesses of the Mau Mau guerillas. David Maughan-Brown in a discussion of four novels dealing with this event forwards the opinion that Mwangi, Mangwa and Wachira represent it "in just as negatively equivocal a manner as the politicians and businessmen whose political and commercial interests were most obviously served by the tactic of retrospective criminalisation of the movement'" (1985: 206).

Prose writing in Kenya has also explored other themes. Charles Mangua and David Maillu have depicted the alienation of the educated elite, their growing disillusionment, the generation gap between parents and their children in works which have been discredited as non-serious and lacking in value because of the supposedly obscene language used. Women novelists and short story writers like Charity Waciuma and Grace Ogot voice their concern for the place of women in African society. Waciuma's autobiographical work *Daughter of Mumbi* presents events in Kenya immediately after independence through the consciousness of a young village girl who grows up to be a teacher. In her stories Ogot, who has played an active part in Kenyan politics, also presents simple village characters who, once they become politically informed, try to remedy the ills plaguing post-independence Kenya. Much of the recent Kenyan writing has moved beyond nationalist concerns to other social, political and economic issues which need to be voiced and redressed. This brief account of prose writing in Kenya has attempted to indicate this shift.

2.3.2 Theatre in Nigeria

Theatre in Nigeria developed out of a combination of traditional rituals involving masquerades, chants, music, dancing and themes and ideas derived from the Bible under the influence of the missionaries. As Ulli Beier has detailed in an exhaustive essay on Yoruba theatre which "began to perform Biblical stories in and outside the church" with music based on Yoruba hymns. These plays, first performed in the nineteen thirties, were meant for the instruction of members belonging to that particular faction of the Church as well as fund-raising devices (1967: 245). Since both traditional and alien influences helped in initiating theatrical activity in Nigeria, in this section I shall talk about theatre in Nigerian languages as well as in English.

A coming together of both influences is seen in the plays of Hubert Ogunde who is credited with the initiation of professional theatre in Yoruba (Beier) and the secularisation of Yoruba drama (Gerard, 1981). Yoruba language theatre has the advantage of attracting large audiences and is therefore a commercially profitable proposition. Moreover Ogunde's plays with their improvised dialogues, music based on hymn tunes but using traditional instruments and political satire were very popular in Nigeria and outside it. He first started performing in the 1940s. Very early on in his career his commitment to social causes was revealed in a vernacular play entitled *Strike and Hunger* (1945), dramatizing the country-side strike which broke out in 1945. The titles of some of his other plays *Let the Yoruba Think* and *Truth is Bitter* hint at their being vehicles for social and political commentary. Ogunde's theatrical development has been discussed in four neat phases by Michael Etherton: the phase of cultural nationalism from 1944-1950; consolidation of the company through independence 1954-64; post-independence party politics 1964-66; the company since the civil war 1972 to the present day. Etherton is of the opinion that Ogunde does not seem to have responded to the political organisation in various regions of Nigeria which was taking place in the 1950s (1982: 46). Despite this and other kinds of criticism levelled against the sensationalism and spectacle of Ogunde's plays there is no denying that his travelling theatre was instrumental in creating a tradition of Yoruba drama which others built on. One of these was Ogunde's colleague E.K. Ogunmola who removed the music hall element from Ogunde's plays and substituted it by serious acting to develop Yoruba 'Opera' as a "serious theatre form" (Beier,

1967: 245). Ogunmola is famous for his dramatic rendition of Amos Tutuola's folkloric quest-narrative *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. Some of his plays like *Conscience* and *Love of Money* are social satires aimed at exposing the materialism and hypocrisy rampant in Nigerian society. Another important Yoruba playwright is Duro Ladipo who draws on Yoruba myths, poetry, music for his plays. He has used Samuel Johnson *History of the Yorubas* (1921) as source material for the legends he dramatises in *The King Did Not Hang* and *The King is Dead*. The former gained international acclaim when it was performed at the Berlin Theatre and Music Festival in 1964 and at the Commonwealth Festival in Britain in 1965. One of Ladipo's favourite themes is the clash of cultures, sometimes explored through myths, legends and at other times through folklore.

Yoruba language theatre in Nigeria is complemented by English-language theatre. Soyinka's plays for instance also explore the contact and clash between tradition and modernity through myths, legends and folklore. In fact Soyinka's dramatic theory derives from this aspect of Yoruba culture. The traditional content of Soyinka's plays has often been a subject of discussion. It has been suggested that as far as the songs in his plays are concerned, they are "pseudo-traditional," many are taken from "popular disc records of modern commercial musicians who work in the traditional mode" (Ogumba, 1972: 5). Perhaps the strength of Soyinka's dramaturgy lies in using tradition or pseudo-tradition to comment on the contemporary Nigerian situation. A case in point is *A Dance of the Forests*, performed in October 1960, the month in which Nigeria achieved Independence, which uses Yoruba myths to indicate the destiny to be attained by post-Independence Nigeria. Soyinka has explored a variety of dramatic styles in his ocuvre: farce, tragedy and romantic mythology being a few of these (Esslin, 1967: 260). Nigeria's other major English-language playwright is J.P. Clark. He too has transmuted legends into plays, the most famous of these being *Ozidi* (1966). This play derives from the traditional Ijo saga or epic, centred on Orua in the Delta region of Nigeria (Etherton, 1982: 68). His other plays *The Raft, The Masquerade* and *The Song of the Goat* published together in 1964 are all realistic tragedies. Both Soyinka and Clark use a highly stylized poetic idiom but to different purposes. Clark's characters are generalized in part due to what Esslin has labelled "the stark, timeless and almost placeless simplicity of the language" whereas Soyinka's use of verse reinforces his plays' setting in the present, "a very recognizable independent Nigeria with its corrupting town life set against superstition and backwardness in the countryside" (Esslin, 1967: 260). Reading through this synoptic survey I hope it is apparent to you how English and local language (specifically Yoruba) theatre in Nigeria draws upon local traditions to reflect, discuss and critique the social and political ills plaguing contemporary Nigeria to emerge as a theatre of commitment.

2.4 THE WRITER IN AFRICA

2.4.1 Cultural and Political Assertion

Assertions of cultural and political nationalism are usually viewed as a part of the anti-colonial struggles of the colonized. Only two examples of such assertions will be given in this section: that of Negritude which posits an African world union based on shared racial, cultural and spiritual essences and that of the 'African Personality' which is pan-Africanist in its orientation.

The Negritude movement started by intellectuals from the French colonies is seen as a reaction against the French colonial policy of assimilation. According to Frantz Fanon the assimilationist phase constitutes the first stage of cultural evolution. The second stage is the "cultural nationalist" phase in which the native intellectual remembers an "authentic identity" and "kicks against" attempts at assimilation (Amuta, 1989: 158-59). So Negritude (the word was coined by Aimé Cesaire) represents the second phase in Fanon's schema. Its key ideas are a repudiation of

"certain intrinsic values of European civilization" such as its machine technology, materialism, contractual manner of social relationships, adherence to scientific planning in every detail. In contrast it "extols the African's close attachment to the soil and to nature, the warmth of his humanity expressed in relationships which are purely personal and zest for a life which is not circumscribed by much planning" (Obiechina, 1967: 27). This view of an unsullied African cultural and social essence has, on the one hand, been deemed essential to a recovery of African dignity (Achebe) and on the other, been repudiated as replicating the stereotypes of the instinctual African versus the rational Westerner established by the colonisers (Soyinka). Soyinka's is the most trenchant critique which has been launched against the Negritudists. Responding to statements like "Emotion is completely Negro as reason is Greek" Soyinka says that Negritude "accepted one of the most common blasphemies of racism, that the black man has nothing between his ears, and proceeded to subvert the power of poetry to glorify this fabricated justification of European cultural domination" (qtd. In Booth, 1981: 9). This denial of reason to Africans is, in Soyinka's view, playing into the hands of Europeans who used this logic to justify colonisation. Valid though Soyinka's argument is, it is probably necessary to see Negritude as an 'essential' step in the reconstitution of a racial and cultural identity.

Kwame Nkrumah's philosophy of 'the African Personality' is often dismissed on the same grounds as the Negritude movement. What I now want to emphasise is that both Nkrumah's nationalist and pan-African vision represent what Fanon has called the "nationalist" or "fighting" phase in which the native man of culture "after having tried to lose himself in the people, will on the contrary shake the people" (Fanon qtd. In Armuta, 1989: 159). Kwame Appiah has observed that Nkrumah's nationalist enthusiasms were largely pan-Africanist and hence it needn't come as a surprise that he was central to the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity, represented Africa in the Non-Aligned Movement and at the UN and was consistent in his preoccupation with the complete liberation of Africa from colonial rule (1992: 262-63). Look at this extract from Nkrumah's work *I Speak of Freedom* (1961) and mark the use of cultural stereotypes and political prophecy:

> I believe strongly and sincerely that with the deep-rooted wisdom and dignity, the innate respect for human lives, the intense humanity that is our heritage, the African race, united under one federal government, will emerge not as just another world bloc to flaunt its wealth and strength, but as a Great Power whose greatness is indestructible because it is built not on fear, envy and suspicion, nor won at the expense of others, but founded on hope, trust, friendship and directed to the good of all mankind.
>
> (qtd. In Booth, 1981: 14-15)

Notice the use of adjectives like "deep-rooted wisdom and dignity," "innate respect," "intense humanity" which are said to characterise "the African race." There is an easy slippage from racial characteristics to political rhetoric when it is said that this race will be united under "one federal government," a form of pan-African unity, which Nkrumah envisaged. In an attempt to define both the 'African Personality' and pan-Africanism, some indication of which is provided in the passage quoted above, Obiechina has forwarded the view that whereas the latter "is an essentially political movement aimed at continental co-operation between independent African states," the former "is a psycho-ethnological concept resembling Negritude but differing from it because it applies to the African continent alone" (1968: 29).

These instances of cultural and political self-definition need to be viewed as arising out of the exigencies of colonial rule and neocolonial domination over African countries. Both the Negritudists from French colonial Africa and the Caribbean and Nkrumah from Ghana voice versions of cultural and political autonomy. If these inadvertently echo racist vocabulary it is probably because, in Achebe's ringing words, "it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with . . . an

anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are much better" (qtd. in Booth, 191: 11).

2.4.2 Censorship

The important role fulfilled by writers in their engagement with social, cultural and political concerns has not gone unchallenged in Africa. Many have had to pay a heavy personal price for their activist creativity in the form of bans on their work, imprisonment and exile. One of the earliest instances is the ban imposed by the colonial authorities on Ogunde's play *Strike and Hunger* in 1945. In the 1960s Ogunde produced plays commenting on political events in Western Nigeria. As a result his company was banned for performing in the region for about three years. Ladipo, another Yoruba playwright, was caught in the midst of a controversy about the use of drums in the church, leading him to perform his religious compositions outside the church (Gerard, 1981: 256). Soyinka continues the tradition of Nigerian playwrights getting into trouble with the authorities. This is largely due to his deliberately provocative activities such as supposedly forcing his way into the Ibadan Radio Station in 1965 to substitute a tape announcing an Action Group election victory in place of the official tape announcing a rigged victory or covering his car with placards accusing the police of brutality (Booth, 1981; 119-20). An account of his imprisonment is grandiosely titled *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972). Whether through activism in literature or through direct involvement in political events, Nigerian authors have aroused the ire of authorities leading to consequences like the ones detailed.

The crackdown on artistic freedom has taken more severe forms in the East African countries Kenya and Uganda. The Ugandan poet Okot p' Bitek's best known work *Song of Lawino* was at first rejected by publishers because of its explicitness in sexual matters. Okot was later dismissed from his post as Director of the Uganda Cultural Centre because of his outspokenness in political matters. Living in exile in Nigeria he found employment at the University of Nairobi (Gerard, 1981; 305). No writer illustrates the case for political persecution better than Ngugi wa Thiong'o who got into trouble with the authorities over the performance of his play *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977) in Kikuyu. Deemed as politically subversive its license was revoked after a few performances and Ngugi was put under detention on 31st December 1977. The official explanation was that he was "being held under the Public Security Act for possessing 18 banned books" (Sicherman, 1990: 11). He wrote *Devil on the Cross* while in prison and later published an account of his imprisonment in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. In 1982 while Ngugi was in London he received news of his impending arrest in Nairobi and decided to remain in exile. Over the years he has been accused of leading a clandestine opposition political group in Kenya, his books have been suppressed by the government and people arrested for reading them out aloud (Sicherman, 1990: 16-17).

The careers of these African writers illustrate the conjunction between literature and society which they have been attempting in their work. That this conjunction often takes the form of state sponsored repression of the right to free expression only serves to indicate that many African writers get too close to reality for comfort.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

I began this unit by discussing the close relationship between culture and language. There are diverse cultures and many languages reflective and constitutive of those cultures in Africa: Yoruba and Kikuyu being only two of them. That these have received considerable attention in the recent past is, in no small measure, owing to their cause being championed by Soyinka and Ngugi. Both are a part of the tradition of socially committed writing which, despite attempts to curb it, has exerted a

profound influence in the nationalist and post-nationalist phases of various African countries. A sign of the vitality of such a tradition is the exchange of ideas among African writers in the form of endorsement or critique. Thus Soyinka critiques the Negritudists, Achebe defends them and their influence on Nkrumah is more than obvious. The role of the writer in Africa is not, or rather cannot be, restricted to that of a social commentator. As Ngugi has shown through his grassroots theatrical activities it is necessary to involve the masses if literature and culture are to serve as effective tools of resistance. If this resistance involves taking the risk of persecution, African literary history illustrates that writers consider this a small price to pay.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. How is language reflective of culture? Cite the views of two African writers on this issue.

2. List the advantages and disadvantages attendant in the use of Swahili as a pan-African language.

3. Discuss the intersection of literature and politics with reference to prose writing in Kenya and theatre in Nigeria.

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 CARIBBEAN LITERATURE – THE AESTHETIC OF DIASPORA

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 The 1930's - Towards Culture Decolonisation
3.3 The 'Boom' and the Writer in Exile
3.4 The Decades of the Critics
3.5 Towards New Voices
3.6 Let Us Sum Up
3.7 Questions
3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall firstly map the emergence of Anglophone Caribbean aesthetics – we shall locate the moments when Caribbean writers and critics debated and discussed issues pertaining to Caribbean writing and criticism. This brief survey would focus approximately on a 50 year period from 1930 to 1980 when Caribbean writers and critics undertook the project of cultural decolonisation and resistance against colonial power to forge national consciousness. We all know that literary productions are entangled in historical moments, they are also a result of specific social and material conditions. In this survey, I shall also try to contextualize the Caribbean aesthetic within its specific historical and material conditions. Any study of writing in and from the Caribbean has to acknowledge and contend with the basic sense of its diasporic nature – (What do we mean by diaspora? Literally it means dispersion and comes from the Bible which describes the scattering of the Jews in various countries outside Palestine. Today diaspora refers to those people who have gone out of their original homelands and live in other countries. eg. People of Indian origin living in the Caribbean are called the Indian diaspora. In the introduction, I will outline the historical context of the emergence of the diaspora.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

> "Mr. Biswas found it easy to imagine the other race of Indians moving about this road before the world grew dark for them"
>
> **(A House for Mr. Biswas,** Naipaul, 397)

Writing in **An Area of Darkness**, Naipaul remembers reading about the disappearance of the indigenous population –

> "... the aborginal inhabitants of the West Indies 'sickened and died' when the spaniards came ..."
>
> **(An Area of Darkness**, Naipaul, 209)

These two quotations from V.S. Naipaul foreground the troubled history of colonialism in the Caribbean. The colonial encounter between the immigrants and the original inhabitants had a great impact on the culture, society and history of the region. Any engagement with Caribbean literary production would be incomplete without an engagement with the colonial encounter and its impact. I shall briefly describe this process.

The 'discovery' of the Caribbean islands by Christopher Columbus in 1492 led to a brutal period of colonial domination that continued till the 1960's when most of the Caribbean nations gained independence. The Spaniards established the first European settlement in eastern Hispaniola in 1502, and by the middle of sixteenth century they had fanned out into other islands. The Dutch, Portugese, English and French colonisers followed the Spanish and by the eighteenth century the entire Caribbean region was under colonial rule which by now was predominantly English. The territorial and economic ambitions of the colonial enterprise led to the extermination and often brutal decimation of the indigenous Amerindian population. The aboriginal inhabitants were victims of expansionist colonial policy, social dislocation and new epidemic diseases like measles and small pox. Those who survived had their social, political and cultural lives reorganized in the name of Christianity and its 'civilizing missions'. Their lives were regimented by slavery and demands of a profit oriented commercial policy in mining and pearl fishing followed by the European powers. The Europeans who invaded and conquered the Caribbean destroyed the world of the native people and realigned their world with larger Eurocentric events where their histories collided with other histories in Africa, Asia and Europe to produce a mongrel and hybrid Caribbean experience.

Introduced by the Dutch in 1640, the sugar plantation system provided the necessary attraction to potential colonisers . The island economies based on small farms producing cash crops of cotton and tobacco were changed into large plantations requiring vast expanse of land and large labour force. The Amerindian population had all but disappeared and this shortage resulted in the forced migration of African slaves. Between 1518 and 1870, the transatlantic slave trade supplied the greatest proportion of the Caribbean population. This trade was so lucrative that even the English royal family invested in the company of Royal Adventurers Chartered in 1663! Commenting on the African diaspora, Cuban born Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter says –

> "Our conditions is one of uprootedness. Our uprootedness is the original model of total twentieth century disruption of man ... We anticipated by centuries that exile which is our own century Is now common to all ..." (307)

The abolition of slavery by the British Parliament in 1834 and the end of apprenticeship system in 1838 marked the next watershed in Caribbean history. The abolition of slavery and ban on slave trade necessitated the import of indentured labourers to work on plantations. (Who are indentured labourers? They were labourers who had entered into written agreement with their masters.) They arrived mainly from India and China. Between 1838 and 1917 when the indentured system was abolished, nearly 500,000 East Indians from U.P. and Bihar immigrated to the Caribbean. Apart from the fact that these indentured people had a legally defined term of service and were guaranteed a set wage, these Asian indentured labourers were treated like African slaves whom they had partially replaced in the fields and factories. These new immigrants added to the different nationalities that made up the ruralistic Caribbean Society.

An important fallout of the abolition of slavery and subsequently indentured system was the emergence of an educated middle class and working class population. Supported by various British trade union groups, these were the precursors of the rise of nationalism in the Caribbean. Post – Independence Caribbean society witnessed the emergence of nationalist sentiments. Between 1880 and 1920, Anglophone Caribbean nations saw nation wide agitations for better wages and working conditions. The social unrest within the Caribbean was an obvious fall out of a long history of colonial rule and neglect which had resulted in poor social conditions and low wages. Demands for self government and political representation gained popular support. The Caribbean people adopted the mode of general strikes and riot as a potent weapon of protest against the colonial authorities. The canefield riots in

Trinidad, the sugar worker strike in Trinidad in 1934, and oil workers strike in 1937 led to a general strike and the dock workers went on strike in 1938 in Jamaica. Disturbances rapidly spread with a wave of riots and strikes across Barbados, British Guayana and Jamaica & Trinidad & Tobago. Another important event that had far reaching implication was the establishment of the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica in 1930 by Marcus Garvey. Rastafarianism soon became a political and cultural movement that helped to consolidate the black power movement in the Caribbean. As a political and cultural ideology it had an immense contribution in forging a sense of national consciousness and identity for the blacks, and helped it to emerge as the dominant social, group in the Caribbean. One of the 'solutions' to tackle the growing social discontent and contain the nationalist sentiments was the granting of the universal adult suffrage by the British to the islands.

The British government also pushed for a modified self government and created the West Indian Federation in 1958. Complete independence was achieved in the following decades, with Trinidad and Tobago achieving independence in 1962, Barbados in 1966, Bahamas in 1973, Grenada in 1974, Dominica in 1978, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1979, Antigua and Barbados in 1981 and St. Kitts and Nevis in 1983.

This brief and selective historical mapping foregrounds the most significant aspects of Caribbean society – the impact of European colonization almost wiped out the Amerindian population (they survive in few reserves in Guayana & Dominica) and the Africans, East Indians and other ethnic minorities were forced into their diaspora. Consequently the Caribbean experience has become synonymos with diaspora and exile, it has become a land of ethnically diverse people with diverse histories, who were forced into living together. The result has been a curious mongrel and hybrid Caribbean identity where pre conquest Amerindian, post conquest European and African and post emancipation Indian and Chinese identities and histories jostle for space and accommodation.

The emergence of a Caribbean literary aesthetic has to be viewed within this historical condition of uprootedness. As Naipaul says "Living in a borrowed culture, the West-Indian, more than most needs writers to tell him who he is, where he stands" (The Middle Passage, pp. 73). Commenting on this condition of dislocation and displacement, Braithwaite says. "The most significant feature of West Indian life and imagination since Emancipation has been its sense of rootlessness, of not belonging to the landscape .... The problem of and for West Indian artists and intellectuals is that having been born and educated within this fragmented culture, they start out in the world without a sense of wholeness ....." (Timeheri, 344) In this 'borrowed culture', the writer is not only trying to reclaim his / her own history, he also needs to do so for other lost histories. The emergence of a Caribbean literary tradition is thus an attempt at decolonising the culture and people from the literal and literary colonization of the Britishers. It is also an enterprise to reclaim and forge alter / native cultural traditions for a people who were forced into their diasporas.

3.2 THE 1930'S

The emergence of a re-visionist agenda for Caribbean literature can be located in the turbulent decades of the 1930's and 1940's. We have already seen that the Anglophone Caribbean was moving towards a new national consciousness, at least in its collective opposition to colonial rule. In this period of flux generated by the popular social unrest, the cultural identities were extremely mobile and hybrid. Concurrent with the rise of political nationalism, Caribbean writers and intellectuals were also trying to forge their cultural identities. Hence cultural decolonisation become an important aspect of this agenda. Certain writers were articulating and

writing about their separate national identities and moving away from an anglocentric aesthetic tradition and a Leavisite 'moral vision'. (This refers to F.R. Leavis's book *The Great Tradition* in which he identifies the "great" writers on the basis of their "moral vision"). The Caribbean little magazines particularly *The Beacon* in Trinidad and *Public Opinion* in Jamaica made significant contribution in realigning pubic opinion against the colonial literary models and ideologies. Writers associated with these magazines functioned as cultural agitators, Albert Gomes calls them "angry youngmen of the thirties", who highlighted the importance of the local and specific regional identities. They advocated a breaking away from the bonds of cultural allegiances to colonialism. The central issue for most of these writers was to a have cultural reorientation that would avoid psuedo –Britishness. A quote from Albert Gomes' article *'A West Indian Literature'* published in *The Beacon* in 1933 will substantiate the point.– Gomes' article sets out a manifesto for indigenous literature –

> "It is important more over, that we break away as far as possible from the English tradition : and the fact that some of us are still slaves to Scott & Dickness is merely because we lack the necessary artistic individuality and sensibility in order to see how incongruous that tradition is with the West Indian scene and spirit ..... the sooner we throw off the veneer of culture that our colonization has brought us the better for our artistic aims .... One has only to glance through the various periodicals published in this and other islands to see what slaves we still are to English culture and tradition. There are some who lay great store by this conscious aping of another man's culture but to us it merely seems a sign of the immaturity of our spirit " – (113)

The nationalist writers advocated socially realist writings and a literary naming of the landscape as a tool of resistance against the colonial hangover. The publication of regional works such as Norman Cameron's **Guianese Poetry** 1831-1931 & Albert Gomes **'A selection from the fiction and verse of the Island of Trinidad** (1937), journals such as Bim in Barbados (founded 1942) & Kyk-over-al in Jamaica (founded in 1945) and BBC Caribbean voices radio programme helped to create a sense of national pride as well as facilitated localized cultural exchanges. A key text that helped in this project of cultural decolnization was Vic Reid's **New Day** (1949). Reid traced the emergence of Jamaican society from the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1944 through the character of Johnny Campbell and used creole (a native language formed by the combination of a European language with indigenous languages) as the language of narration. The emphasis on resistance, protest and rootedness in this historical novel was to have important resonances for Caribbean literature in the later decades.

This project of cultural decolonization also undertook to expose and oppose the colonial education. Many writers critiqued the colonial educational system as a means of ideological domination that thwarted the rise of indigenous consciousness. Commenting on the overarching influence of colonial education, George Lamming wrote in *'The Occasion for speaking'*.

> "... The West Indians' education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter was imported from Canada. Since the cultural negotiation was strictly between England and the natives and England had acquired, somehow the divine right to organize the natives' reading, it is to be expected that Englands' export of literature would be English. Deliberately and exclusively English. And the further back in time England went for these treasures, the safer was the English commodity. So the examinations, which would determine the Trinidadians future in the civil service, imposed Shakespeare and Wordsworth, and Jane Austen and George Eliot and the whole tabernacle of dead names .... How in the name of Heavens could a colonial native taught by an English native within a strict curriculum ..... how could he ever get out from under this ancient mausoleum of historic achievement? ..." (254-5).

Note the voice of indignant protest and strident criticism of the hegemonic control exercised by colonial education! A different register of protest can be seen in a short calypso (A type of song based on a subject of interest in the news and sung in a West Indian manner) *'Dan is the Man'* by the Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco). As a folk-form, the calypso originated in West Africa and incorporates elements of digging songs chanted by people at work. The Calypso has remained a cultural form which speaks and to an often illiterate working class audience.

Dan is the Man

I

According to the education you get when you small
You 'll grow up with true ambition and respect from one an all
But in days in school they teach me like a fool
The things they teach me I should be a block-headed mule.

Pussy had finished his work long ago
And now he resting and thing
Solomon Agundy was born on a Monday
The Ass in the Lion Skin
Winkin Blinkin and Nod
Sail off in a wooden shoe
How the Agouti lose he tail and Alligator trying to get
Monkey liver soup.

II

The poems and the lessons they write and send from England
Impress me they were trying to cultivate comedians
Comic books made more sense
You know it was fictitious without pretence
But like Cutteridge wanted to keep us in ignorance
Humpty Dumpty sat on a wll
Humpty Dumpty did fal
Goosey Goosey Gander
Where shall I wander
Ding dong dell.... Pussy in the well
RIKKI ... TIKKI TAVI
Rikki Tikki Taxi

III

Well Cutteridge he was plenty times more advanced than
them scientists
I aint believe that no one man could write so much foolishness
Aeroplane and rockets didn't come too soon
Scientist used to make the grade in balloon
This time Cutteridge done make a cow jump over the moon.

Tom Tom the piper son
Stole the pig and away he ran
Once there was a woman who lived in a shoe
She had so many children she didn't know what to do
Dickery Dickery Dock
The mouse run up the Clock
The lion and the mouse
A woman pushing a cow up a ladder to eat grass on top a house.

How I happen to get some education my friends I don't
know
All they teach me is about Brer Rabbit and Rumplestilskin
..... O
They wanted to keep me down indeed
They tried their best but didn't succeed
You see I was dunce and up to now I can't read.

Peter Peter was a pumpkin eater
And the Lilliput people tie Gulliver
When I was sick and lay abed
I had two pillows at my head
I see the Goose that lay the golden egg
The Spider and the Fly
Morocoy with wings flying in the sky
They beat me like a dog to learn that in school
If me head was bright I would a be a damn fool

I have quoted entire calypso because it offers a significant insight into an alternative oral literary form that subverts and debunks the tool of colonial education – Capt. J.O. Cutteridge's West Indian Readers (1926-1929), a text book widely used in the Caribbean school curriculum for three decades. It questions the worth of a standardizing education for a Caribbean citizen. The narrator deftly articulates his escape from this debilitating system to save himself from becoming a block headed mule. In its use of irony and cultural mimicry, this calypso can be seen as a sign of protest and resistance that helps shape the emerging Caribbean literature. In fact Braithwaite has firmly argued for according a privileged status to the calypso for not only using it as an available literary model for Caribbean discourse but as a literary form itself.

However it would be naive to presume that this revisionist agenda for a literature of social engagement went unchallenged by a more orthodox position. There were still many writers who accorded an apolitical status to art and subscribed to a more universal, standard and anglocentric view of literature. Two quotations will help us to understand this position. The first is by J.E.C. Mac Farlane from his 1935 address 'The Challenges of Our Time' –

> " ... As representatives of a great tradition. We offer you poetry upon which we feel certain the true foundation of this Europe rests and by which it will be preserved throughout the storm that hangs above the horizon of the civilization..." – (110)

Mr. Farlane also speaks about the function of poetry as being of greatest service to humanity in "restoring the lost outline, in raising it from the maze of sensuous things into the clear atmosphere of the spirit". E. A. Carr's opinion concurs with Mac Farlanes' position –

> "...Many good artists today are deliberately denying .... The essential part that tradition plays in art. The flouting of this fact has something evers of the fanaticism of a crusade .... It seems the political unrest of the age has seeped into and infected the serenity of the sphere of art ..."(III) .

Notice that both McFarlane and Carr unequivocally divorce art and literature from the social and political context and advocate a Leavsite version of tradition and moral values. They privilege the imperial motherland and speak of themselves as part of the imperial culture. Carr infact derides socially committed art as a fanatic crusade with the obvious implication that this crusade needs to be tempered down. According a

privileged and enabling position to the Western tradition is also evident in C.L.R. James' essay *'Discovering Literature in Trinidad'* (1930). He claims an undisguised pride in his intellectual heritage and emphasizes his apprenticeship to western literature. However it is significant to remember that C.L.R. James was a central figure in Trinidad's anti-colonial movements and he drew upon his 'mastery' of classical education to make Trinidadians aware of their society and literature. He is also responsible for upholding cricket as a West Indian sport. His ambivalent subject position reflects the paradoxical situation of a colonized intellectual. He both incorporates the view of the colonizer and the colonized. At least James denies ideologically fixed positions to the heritage of Western Tradition. In this, his position is markedly different to that of McFarlane and Carr who subscribe totally to the ideology of colonial traditions.

The texts and debates within this period were clearly shaped by and instrumental in major cultural transitions that emerged in the Caribbean in later decades. They sought to remake their national identities and Caribbean homelands from their colonial selves. Yet the powerful dominance of the colonial ideology continued to spawn orthodox positions and aesthetic models. The project of cultural decolonisation was far from complete, as our next section will testify. We shall turn to the *'booming'* of the West Indian novel in the 1950s and examine the critical practice of this decade.

3.3 THE 'BOOM' AND THE WRITER IN EXILE

The decade of the 1950's is very often referred to as the decade of the West Indian novel. George Lamming believes that the West Indian novel was one of the important tools that facilitated the rise of national consciousness and challenged the anglocentric ideologies of colonial educational and cultural practices. According to Lamming, the West Indian novelist articulated the voice of the West Indian society and its community. In fact many of the novelists who constitute the dominant voices in the Caribbean canon, emerged during this decade. Some 'classics' associated with the Caribbean canon like Lamming's ***In the Castle of my Skin*** (1957) Naipauls', ***A House for Mr. Biswas*** (1961) and Wilson Harris' ***Palace of the Peacock*** (1960) belong to this period of the booming of the West Indian novel. Significantly all these writers, Samul Selvon, Naipaul, Lamming, Andrew Salkey, Wilson Harris, Edgar Mittelholzer, Kamau Braithwaite, John Hearne, Jan Carew, V. S. Reid, Derek Walcott were male, middle class, educated and with very few exception, based in England. So the formation of a Caribbean canon, inspite of its nationalistic revisionist agenda was formed in and was a function of exile in the metropolitan center (mostly London) and excluded women writers. The marginalized Caribbean operated within its own system of further margins and peripheries. However, the influence of these writers in the creation of an aesthetic of Caribbean canon cannot be underestimated. Two seminal critical texts – Kenneth Ramchand's ***The West Indian Novel and its Background*** (1970) and Wilson Harris' ***Tradition - The Writer and Society*** (1967) firmly established the critical practice to study these writers. The practice included the notions of a separate and specific tradition (different from the English tradition), relationship between writer and society, questions of audience and the responsibility of the artist, themes of alienation and isolated individual, highlighting the importance of the autobiographical novel or the novel of childhood as formative to an emerging of Caribbean literature, the centrality of themes of displacement and dislocation, and the symbols of unhoused and unaccomodated characters (notably in Naipaul's ***Mr. Biswas*** which explores the symbol of the building process). The criticism also included analysis of stylistic and linguistic experimentation (for example the use of Creole by Selvon and Naipaul), the dual pulls of African, Asian or European heritage, preoccupation with naming the landscape, validating the local, the notion of exile, nostalgia and rewriting histories within a largely realist tradition.

However this boom in literary production was largely a function of exile of a number of Caribbean writers for whom London became the literary capital. The phenomenon of exile is not peculiar to Caribbean writers or to this period, but it did have significant impact on Caribbean writing. These writers were a part of a large scale migration of Caribbean people to the 'motherland'. These 'British subjects' were recruited for the service industries after the second world war and they found it hard to resist the allure of the metropolitan center. London was after all part of their cultural myth. David Dabydeen remarked in **Slave Song** (1984) that a mutual representation of otherness has been going on – perhaps for a very long time.

> "...England is our Utopia, an ironic reversal, for Raleigh was looking away from the 'squalor' of his homeland to the imagined purity of our whereas we are now reacting against our 'sordid' environment and looking to 'England' as Heaven...". (121)

The writers who migrated to Britain cited various reasons for their departure. Most like Braithwait felt stifled in the limiting circumstances of the islands. He remarked – "...the West Indies could be written about and explored. But only from the vantage point outside the West Indies. It was no point going back. No writer could live in that stifling atmosphere of middle class materialism and philistinism..." (346). George Lamming, writing about the reasons for large scale migration of writers said, ". .The West Indian of average opportunity and intelligence has not yet been converted to reading as a civilized activity ..... Reading seriously at any age is still largely associated with reading for examination ..... The Writers are afraid of returning ..... Because they feel that sooner or later they will be ignored in and by a society about which they have been at once articularte and authentic..." (259). The historical exigencies, massive illiteracy, lack of responsive audiences, few publishing houses and lack of opportunities to make a career out of writing forced these writers to leave. The situation was worse for black writers as is evident in C.L.R. James' articulation of the social and material reality faced by them – "...We (the blackmen) went one way, these white boy all went the other way. We were black and the only way we could do anything along the lines we were interested in was by going abroad ..... you (the white) stayed not only because your parents had money but because your skin was white; there was a chance for you, but for us there was not – except to be a civil servant and hand papers, take them from the men downstairs and hand them to the man upstairs..." (164).

The metropolitan center (London) did provide a measure of literary and commercial success, but the experience of exile did not prove as liberating and enabling as these writes had expected it to be. Disillusioned by his experiences as a Cambridge undergraduate and the metropolitan attitude to his work, Braithwaite commented on the reasons for his return in *Timehri*, "...I felt that I had arrived, I was possessing the landscape. But I turned to find that my 'fellow Englishmen' were not particularly prepossessed with me.... the Cambridge magazines didn't take my poems.... or rather they only took those which had West Indian, to me 'exotic' flavour. I felt neglected and misunderstood..." (346) Naipaul's case offers a good example of the ambiguous position of the third world post colonial writer. He chose to stay, he attained fame and popularity, he acknowledges his debt to the wider English tradition, yet he feels 'peripheral' to the English Society. He says "...London is my metropolitan center; it is my commercial center; and yet I know that it is a kind of limbo and I am a refugee in the sense that I am always peripheral... " (41).

This articulation of a sense of marginalisation and Braithwait's discomfort at being labeled as 'exotic' points to a larger post colonial paradox. The benchmark for the post colonial writer still remains the acceptance and success in the center, yet the center refuses to offer unconditional accommodation. Thus these writers in exile both gained and lost something, they remained both inside and outside their metropolitan centers.

In the Caribbean, these writers in exile came in for severe criticism. Questions were raised about the efficacy of writing produced for the consumption of a largely metropolitan literati at the expense of the local audience. One of the fiercest critic of the writer-in-exile was Margaret Blundell. Writing in her 1966 article *'Caribbean Readers & Writers"* she commented :

> "...Can a people achieve a real literature if it only produces for export? A society produces writers and artists of ability and imagination. The society can provide its authors with the raw material for their arts, but can the finished work continue to be valid when it is continually played to an alien audience .... After ten years in exile, writing about the Caribbean of ten years ago. The writer is in danger of creating the equivalent of the stage Irishman, a sort of never-never calypso man of Caribbean fiction designed to amuse the fog-bound silent Englishman..." (212).

Blundell states her objection forcefully. She also drew attention to the problems of audience created in this situation especially in relation to the use of language –

> "...Not enough of our poets speak to us through our own vernacular. Inevitably when they are moulded, consciously and unconsciously by far wider reading than most literate West Indians, there is a gap in communication .... Sometimes the acclaim of an absentee and largely urban audience makes the situation worse as the intellectual qualities of poetry are over-emphasized at the expense of more imaginative and intuitive qualities. There is scarcely any local West Indian audience to speak to in this literary idiom..." (212)

However this phenomenon of the writer-in-exile was balanced by other committed writers who chose to stay. Derek Walcott was one of these, he established himself with three poetry collections in 1948, 1962 and 1965. in 1959, he founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop which provided a significant creative outlet for him and other Caribbean dramatists. Commenting on the contrary pull to remain in the Caribbean, Walcott termed it "the power of the provincial". The Guyanese writer, and editor of Kyk-over-al, A. J. Seymour also 'stayed' and provided crucial guidance to Kyk-over-al. Another very important writer who 'remained' was Martin Carter, who published an important volume, **Poems of Resistance from British Guiana** in 1954. S. O. Asien traced the protest tradition in West Indian poetry in a seminal article in the Jamaica Journal in 1972 and said that Carter's poetry is basically situational, intensely personal in the exclusiveness of private experiences and responses but representative and contemporary in their "...stunning reflection of the bleak slice of Guyanese history..." (40-5).

The Caribbean literary practice in this decade of '*boom*' of the novel remained caught within the dichotomy of the expatriate writer and the 'provincial' writer. The aesthetics of socially committed writing continued within the region, where the Caribbean little magazines like Bim, Kyk-over-al, Kaie etc. provided the necessary valuable cultural space for these writers. The threat of Caribbean writing being subsumed within the English canon forced the 'provincials' to commit themselves to establishing regional literature and criticism and to rephrase Blundell to not only, produce for export – for consumption of the '*fog-bound Englishman*' but for the locals, in a language and idiom that was their own. This call for a literature and criticism of their own was to have resonances in the next decades – the late 1960's and 1970's to which I shall now turn.

3.4 THE DECADES OF THE CRITICS

The decades of 1960's and 1970's were years of transition for the various nations in the region. Some had achieved independence, some were aiming for independence. This period saw the transition to post coloniality for these newly independent nations

but the breakup of the West Indian Federation in 1962 disillusioned many. Commenting on this period of transition, Braithwaite wrote in 1977 'The Love – Axe : Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962 – 1974 I.

> "... In 1962, the Federation of the West Indies broke up,..... True, we been left with had universal adult suffrage, and this had taken us into our various independencies and certainly, especially in Jamaica, there was a certain spirit and expression of nationalism. But our '*actions*' had been mainly '*international*' gesture ; anti-establishment, anti-colonial : not popular people-based, certainly not native . . . . The Federation turned out to be a dream of London. Somewhere along the line we had forgotten Garvey, our grass root selves, the insurrection of the 1930's..." (282)

Braithwaite's formulation reechoes Albert Gomes' 1930 manifesto for West Indian literature and Margaret Bludnell's prescription for localizing literary activity. This recentering of literary and critical activity within the Caribbean, rather than from the expatriate base of London, was a seminal feature of this period. This recentering can be located in a series of significant journal essays which I shall look at. These essays made important contributions to debates concerning linguistic and formal experimentation in Caribbean literature. The writers who contributed to these debates included Braithwaite, Walcott and Sylvia Wynter. Other new poets who emerged in this decade and contributed to this revisionist agenda included Mervyn Morris, Dennis Scott, Anthony McNeill, Victor Questal, and the dub or performance poets like Bongo Jerry, Mutabaruka, Oku Onuora, Michael Smith and in Britain Lionton Kwesi Johnson.

It is possible to locate a shift within the Caribbean literary practice from the earlier West Indian to a proper Caribbean matrix in this period. I shall try to locate this shift through 4 journal essays – '*... We must learn to sit down together and discuss a little culture – Reflections on West Indian writing and Criticism...* ' by Cuban born Jamaican writer and critic Sylvia Wynter, '*Timehri* ' and '*Jazz and the West Indian Novel, I, II, III,* ' by Braithwaite and '*The Muse of History* ' by Derek Walcott. These essays offered introspective theorizations about Caribbean literary and critical discourse, and about the individual subject positions and version of personal revisionist histories of the authors. Their championing of Creole had significant resonances for the use of nation language in the subsequent years of the last century.

Sylvia Wynters' essay. *We must learn to sit down together and discuss a little culture – Reflection on West Indian writing and criticism, (1968 – 1969)* discusses the historical and material impact colonialism and migration had on West Indian society where Literature and critical practices were merely reduced to the status of being '*branch-plants*' to the metropolitan centre. She criticised writers, notably Walcott who she said were 'trapped at times with the cultural myth rather than the cultural reality of Europe'. This cultural myth underproped the economic and political power of Europe in its exploitation of the non-Europeans. The writers and critics had to come to terms with the cultural reality of Europe and free themselves from the dominance of Europe as a super culture. She also attacked the 'acquiescent critic' who is 'mediated to his bones by the colonial myth in which he is involved'. For Wynter the 'swing of the pendulum will redress the balance towards the myth of Africa'. Reflecting on her subject position Wynter said 'I returned because I had no choice. I could not write, my talent did not suffice, except I could return to the lived experience of my own corner of reality. I accepted that writing would have to be done in the interstices of my time' (308) Wynters' essay was one of the seminal essays that reiterated the need to recentre critical activity within the Caribbean and shake off the appendage of the branch plant syndrome and to articulate the lived reality of the Afro-Caribbean experience.

Jazz and the West Indian Novel I, II, III is an attempt at theorizing the critical practice of the West Indian novel where Braithwaite was trying to show a form of literature

similar to the Jazz. This essay is a little confusing as Braithwaite is unable to offer correspondences between a musical form and literature. However what he implies is a linguistic aesthetic that would incorporate the folk experiences and privilege the indigenous form of calypso, reggae, ska, which would position itself against the 'head centered Romantic / Victorian tradition'. This alternative aesthetic would be 'belly centered'. He offers a somewhat ambiguous definition of the Jazz novel – "The Jazz novel ..... deals with specific, clearly defined, folk type community....(and) will try to express the essence of this community through its form ...." but his agenda for Caribbean writers is unambiguous – "a Creole culture. And a Creole way of seeing first" (342 – 43), thereby reiterating his position that the site of protest, resistance and social engagement had to be located with in the physical and figurative space of the Caribbean.

In *Timehri* (1970) Braithwaite examined a range of issues pertinent to his own critical practices and Caribbean criticism in general. Braithwaite's position about Creole was still in a formulative state, he saw it as a national – language only in 1984. He advocated the reclamation of the Amerindian and African past of the Caribbean experience and a positive reinscription of Caribbean culture. This essay was significant as Braithwatie articulated the seminal contribution made by the Amerindian culture to contemporary Caribbean art forms. In framing the development of a Caribbean aesthetic, he projected it as a "...journeying into the past and hinter land which is at the same time a movement of possession into present and future. Through this movement of possession we become truly ourselves, truly our own creators, discovering word for object, image for the word..." (350)

Braithwaite articulated the need to transcend the cultural problem of rootlessness and plurality foreground by the writers of 1950's. The repossession that he advocates would become possible if the writers could rediscover their sense of community as he had done in discovering his historical diviners' in a Ghanian village.

> "...I was coming to an awareness and understanding of community, of cultural wholeness of the place of the individual within the tribe, in society. ... I came to a sense of identification of myself with these people, my living diviners. I came to connect my history with theirs, the bridge of my mind now linking Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland.... And I came home to find that I had not really left. That it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean.... The connection between my lived, but un-heeded non-middle class boyhood, and its Great Tradition on the eastern mainland had been made..." (347)

There is a complete rejection of the Eurocentric Leavisite "Great Tradition." Instead Braithwaite reaffirms his African ancestry that went on to provide him with valuable critical insights for his later work. In this extremely personalized history. Braithwaite offers a commonality with Wynters' position of coming back to her '*lived corner of reality*', to her sense of personal time. Both Wynter and Braithwaite firmly relocated themselves in their margins rather than at the metropolitan centre.

The other essay that helped to reformulate Caribbean aesthetic was Derek Walcott's *'Muse of History'* (1974), where he discussed the relationship between a writer, his ancestry and history. Walcott rejected the linearity of time and based his revisionist agenda on the cyclical and fluidity of historical moments. He categorized history as a narrative discourse without morality and argued that writers had to emerge out of the trap of linear history, out of their engagement with bitterness and recriminatory involvement with the past. Instead they had to grasp the fictionality of history, so that they could have a more interpenetrative engagement with the past and the present. In Walcott's formulation, this is the only alternative that Caribbean people and artists have of liberating themselves from the tyrannies of their colonial memories and histories. This liberation would be enabling as it would offer a more productive and honest engagement with their individual subject position. Walcott carried forward his

reformulation of his revisionist history in his 1992 Nobel Prize lecture. '*The Antilles : Fragments of Epic Memory*" where he privileged the present and the unconsciouness rather than the recovery of the past. He rejects a notion of Caribbean history that only engages with its sense of loss and oppression. He anticipates a culture of change and newness and affirms the Caribbean as a place of emotional possibility with enormous creative resources that can be enabling, inspirational and liberating for its people and writers.

This introspective critical practice opened new possibilities for Caribbean literary production in the following years. Whether it was Wynters' and Braithwaite's formulation of recuperating the African self and connecting with a sense of community or Walcott's vision of cyclical historicity with possibilities of liberation, these essays provided significant insights to our understanding of the rise of performative or dub poetry that dominated the decade of 1980's. The 1970 and 1979 Savacou anthologies also provided the impetus to this new aesthetic and in opening up the canon to new trends and new voices. These two anthologies foregrounded a shift in concerns from anti-colonial oppositional modes to more introspective and non-colonial oppositional modes to reclaim a Caribbean subjectivity. In the next section, we shall turn to the aesthetic of dub poetry and the use of nation language that has been an enabling and liberating experience for the Caribbean writers.

3.5 TOWARDS NEW VOICES

I have already pointed out that the preoccupation with linguistic idiom was a dominant trend in the attempts to forge an indigenous Caribbean aesthetic. Linguistic experimentation with Creole as a narrative trend was an important constituent of the many 'classics' produced in the boom period, specially in the works of Selvon and Naipaul. In the 1930's and 1940's, Louise Benett experimented with Jamaican Creole in her poetry. However it needs to be pointed out that these earlier experiments were not well articulated theoretical positions and very often were criticized for merely reproducing an exotic flavour, specially as noted in the criticism by the metropolitan critics, who failed to understand the subversive implications of Creole language. Even within the Caribbean, Creole was regarded as a "*Dialect*.... a '*broken tongue*' with which it is impossible to build an edifice of verse possessing the perfect symmetry of finished art (McFarlane, 1956 12). Samuel Selvon was asked by metropolitan critics to modify his linguistic range so that he could be 'understood' by a wider audience and the pioneering poetry of Louise Bennett was seen as 'dialect' rather than literature. Mervyn Morris commented, rather sadly in 1967 that 'The language which maids and yard boys (use) is not yet accepted simply as one of our Jamaican ways of speech" (Morris, 1967, 12). In his introduction to Bennett's **Jamaican Labrish** (1966), Rex Nettleford referred to Creole as an 'unruly substance' and 'an idiom whose limitations as a bastard tongue are all too evident" (Nettleford, 1966, 12). All these observations point to the uneasy status that Creole occupied in the Caribbean. It was either not literary enough, and of course that benchmark for literariness was British Standard English, or if it was used, it was relegated to the lowly status of a dialect, broken tongue, bad English, exotic use or as comic intrusion!

The reception of Creole started changing with ground breaking linguistic studies on Creole from 1960's onwards. I have already pointed out that the Caribbean writers and critics were championing the cause of Creole and a vernacular idiom during the 1960's. Closely read, Margaret Blundell's prescription for West Indian writers (1966) she exhorts them to speak to their people in the vernacular and not tailor their literature to suit the preferences and expectations of a literate / urban / international audience. She criticizes the writer in exile for packaging the language to suit a literature written for export. The central issue at stake was to privilege the use of Creole as a literary linguistic idiom that would help define the indigenous Caribbean

aesthetic. The emphasis on indigenous, grass roots and folk resources in the critical practice of the 1970's championed the cause of Creole. The strongest statement in favour of Creole have been made by Braithwaite and Merle Hodge. Bratihwaite traces the historical origins of the low status of Creole to the language spoken by African slaves on the sugar plantation. These languages were severely undermined in favour of the European '*standard*'. This led to the formation of a submerged language with rich potential for cultural resistance (refer to the calypso *Dan is the man* where you see the subversive use of Creole vs standard English) where it becomes simultaneously powerless and empowering. (1984). Braithwaite articulated his theorization about Creole in his 1979 Harvard lecture – '*History of the voice : The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*' which was later published in 1984. He elevated Creole to the status of a 'nation language' as a more culture specific term, which is less neutral than Creole and affirmed, a positive status for Caribbean non-'*standard*' language. Merle Hodge in her 1990 essay '*Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty*' makes an impassioned plea for the recognition of Creole –

> "....We speak Creole, we need Creole, we cannot function without Creole, for our deepest thought processes are bound up in the structure of Creole, but we hold Creole in contempt..."(Hodge, 1990 – 13)

The fact that Hodge makes this emotional and passionate appeal for acceptance of Creole testifies to the problematic status still accorded to Braithwaites' nation-language. Inspite of making inroads in to the literary practice, Creole has not been widely accepted within and outside the Caribbean as a vialble alternative to standard English, for usage in academic or journalistic discourse. However linguistic experiments with nation language continue and some journalists like Carolyn Cooper are using Creole journalism (1989) when she reviewed **Lion heart Gal** in Creole. This testifies to the powerful hegemonic domination of the colonial discourse that still exists in the Caribbean.

Yet one significant contribution of nation language and indigenization has been the emergence of performance or dub poetry. I have already mentioned that performance poets like Bongo Jerry, Mutabaruka, Oku Onuora, Michael Smith and Linton Kwesi Johnson in Britain were among the new poetic voices that emerged in the 1970's. Dub poetry relies heavily on the performative and musical element where occasion and delivery are as important as what it written down. Hence it has been categorized as an oral literary form. Louise Bennett's **Jamaica Labrish** (1944) and her later poetry and Braithwaites 1973 **The Arrivants : A New World Triology** are considered important forerunners of performance poetry. Braithwaite's experiements in **The Arrivants** in making use of black musical rhythms and forms, like work songs, spritiuals, mento, ska, reggae, steel pan, calypso, jazz the blues etc. and Bennett's use of Jamaican Creole heavily influenced the later performance poets. It is difficult to grasp the potency and vibrancy of dub poetry unless you witness this poetry being performed. I will quote a few lines from Linton Kwesi Johnson's '*Five Nights of Bleeding*'

> "...night number one was in BRIX / TON :
> was a-beatin out a riddim/wid a fyah,
> commin doun his reggae – reggae wyah;
> it was a sounn shakin doun you spiral col/umn,
> a bad music tearin up you flesh..."

Notice the powerful mesmerizing rhythms which have a jabbing, stabbing physicality which delivers the aggressive tone which would be quite impossible to achieve in the use of standard English.

I shall also quote some prase in nation language from Harry Narain's A letter to the Prime Minister.

"...Dear Comrade Prime Minister,

This letter I writ (t) ing you is not really to ask fo' anything. Is just to tell you what's going on, an I left it to the kindness of you heart to mek we small man something lil mo'better than dey-bad. I don't want it sound like a complaint either, but I got few things on me mind because I see the situation going bad to wo'ss in the rice industry.

You always say when we see things go bad complain. Mek report. Down here who I gon complain to, the police? They gon sey they not concern with the rice industry; go talk to Mr. Burnett, the big boss man at the local rice board. Mr. Burnett office lock up whole day, you don't know whether he in or he out. And with the crowd that brace that office you might give Mr. Burnett all right to protect heself. Any time he pull the bolt it might be like if hydro dam you tell we' bout break. Complain to the radio? Cde. P.M.,. how you go about that? My radio does only talk, it don't listen. The Chronicle? The only person I know connected with the newspaper down here is the lil boy who does bring it round. And the way he behaving he already got one foot in Berbice, if you know what I mean...". (Narain, 407).

You could compare this to Braithwaite's use of nation language in the poetry you read.

Johnson's ground breaking collection **Dread Beat and Blood** (published 1975) in London and Oku Onuora's **Echo** (published in 1977) in Jamaica paved the way for a new generation of dub poets. These two anthologies were characterized by the use of nation language, a strong performance aesthetic, formal and thematic influence of reggae-music, use of biblical allusion and highly politicized contents. Other poets who have contributed to the growing popularity of dub poetry include Jean Binta Breeze, Benjamin Zephaniah, James Berry, Jamaica Kincaid etc. David Dabydenes' ground breaking collection **Slave Song** also uses Creole to record the often marginalized Indo-Caribbean experience and seeks to redress the Afro-centric biases of Caribbean literature. Poets like Grace Nicholas, Lorna, Goodison testify to the enabling and empowering place of oral literary model and indigenization of language within the Caribbean discourse.

It is evident from the brief and selective mapping that the emergence of Caribbean aesthetic has been a project fraught with problematics of identity, history, cultural decolonisation and attempts at indigenization. In this Unit we hope that the key debates will enable you to engage with the writings of Naipaul, Braithwaite and Walcott within their historical, social and material contexts.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

I began this unit by giving you the historical background of the diasporic nature of Caribbean identity where I discussed the impact of colonization, emancipation and the indentured system. In the next section, I briefly outlined the emergence of cultural decolonisation as it took shape during the 1930's and the debates relating to the colonial educational systems and literary models. Gomes and Mc Farlanes' position show us the two extreme positions – Gomes' call for complete decolonisation, while McFarlane subscribes completely to the ideological assumptions of the colonizer.

In the next section, I referred to the 'booming' of West Indian prose fiction that led to the construction of a 'canon' of 'classic' West Indian novels. However, this consolidation was the product of the large scale migration of West Indian writers. The next important point in the development of Caribbean literature was a recentering of literary and critical practice within the region. I have used the four journal essays to point out the major preoccupations and formulations of this period.

The last section points to the new confidence with which contemporary poets and writers are articulating their local existential realities generated by the use of oral literary forms. This trajectory towards a Caribbean aesthetic does in no way imply one homogenous notion of 'Caribbeanness'. The Caribbean identity is still being constructed out of overlapping domains of 'oneness' and 'differences', relating to different language origins and diverse hobbies.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. What are the three major historical moments that have helped create a hybrid Caribbean culture?

2. Colonial educational system was inadequate for creation of national consciousness. Comment with regard to the Caribbean situation.

3. Language is a marker of identity. Comment on the use of nation-language as constitutive of the process of indigenous Caribbean identity.

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4 SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE

Structure

4.0. Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Survey of South- Asian Literatures in English
  4.2.1 Pakistani Literature in English
  4.2.2 Sri Lankan Literature in English
  4.2.3 Bangladeshi Writing in English
  4.2.4 Indian Literature in English
  4.2.5 Twentieth Century Developments in Indian English Fiction
4.3 Postcolonialism
  4.3.1 Unravelling Postcolonialism
  4.3.2 Postcolonial Literary Analysis and Pedagogy
  4.3.3 Problems with the Postcolonial Paradigm
4.4 Literature at the Margins – Some Critical Aspects
  4.4.1 The Question of the Margin
  4.4.2 Women and Literature
  4.4.3 Conceptual Challenges
4.5 Let Us Sum Up
4.6 Questions
4.7 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the unit is to show that the newly emerging literatures in English in South Asia (and the Indian novel, specifically) are the products of complex determinants. The colonial encounter is the foremost determinant for emerging literatures in English in India and the subcontinent. Additionally, the process through which the new nation comes into being, the trauma of partition, the formation of national identities in a situation of political instability all contribute to the vast body of literature, not just in English, but in the regional languages as well.

My attempt in this introduction to a representative body of South Asian literature would be to show how literature refracts realities outside its domain and cannot, therefore, be studied in isolation from them. In this course, you will study Bapsi Sidhwa's partition novel *Ice Candy Man*, which pulls together some of the issues mentioned above.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan), Sri Lanka and Nepal are the countries covered under the rubric of South Asia. Most of these are newly emerging nations, having gained freedom from British colonial power around the late 1940s or so.

The term 'New Literatures in English' has been deemed appropriate to describe the recent literary developments in South Asian countries emerging from the experience of colonialism. The term 'new' in this context would also seek to distinguish between the 'old' British literature produced by representatives of the imperial power and the recent 'new' literature produced by indigenous inhabitants in the English language. 'New Literatures in English is now found preferable to the earlier categorization of 'Commonwealth' or 'Third World Literature', as you might have read. Further,

though 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' are used as well, the idea of "new" literatures also seems to de-emphasise the colonial past and might therefore be preferable to other descriptions.

What each of these literatures from the South Asian region has in common beyond their "special" or distinctive characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and "asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial center." (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.1)

The new literatures in English can be seen to develop through various stages which can be broadly classified as imitation, in the first phase, followed by a phase of protest or resistance and finally to a phase where the 'new' literature develops a distinct identity of its own. In the first phase writers tend to imitate the great works of the imperial power, which become the models for emulation. Shakespeare and the Romantic poets were some of the models for the Indo-English writers in the nineteenth century, which led them to "daffodilize" the tropics or to see their own landscapes through English eyes. This kind of literature can be seen to be produced under "imperial license" and often resulted in a sense of alienation from the lived and experiential reality around them. The careers of the Bengali poet, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and the Sri Lankan James Alwis can be shown as illustrations of this pattern.

In the second stage, there is a denial of the privilege of 'English' and a "refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage" (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p.38). In this first phase of nationalist self-assertion, there is a realization of the power and mastery inscribed in language which leads to a rejection of the colonial culture. The final phase is the development of an indigenous idiom, when the colonized writer is able to appropriate the language – English, in this case - to communicate his/her own cultural experience. This process would lead to a sense of "disalienation", the ability to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p.39)

The importance of language in colonialism and subsequent processes of decolonisation was realized by one of the most well-known critics of colonialism, Frantz Fanon (1927-1963), a psychiatrist from Martinique. While recognizing the potency and power of racial characteristics of 'Blackness' at the heart of the oppression of colonialism, he felt that the power exercised by white over black, colonized over colonizer could be dismantled by a realization of the mystificatory potential of language. In this influential book *Black Skin, White Masks*, he attempts to analyse colonialism and to "help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment" (Fanon, 2001, 160). The black/colonized man, according to Fanon, should be freed from the disabling position of colonialism to the construction of new liberating narratives of decolonisation.

The process of imitation, resistance or protest and then appropriation or forging one's own literary idiom are often foregrounded in the literary works of South Asian writers like Raja Rao (in his preface to *Kanthapura*) and earlier nineteenth century writers like M.M. Dutt and James Alwis of Sri Lanka as well. The fiction, poetry and drama of many writers bear the imprint of the tensions of the colonial relationship while expressing an incipient nationalism and proclaiming development of a distinct identity. However, inherent in this implicit agenda is a danger that Balachandra Rajan cautions against in his address at a Leeds Conference:

> In newer literatures, the pressures of literary nationality can be compulsive and the writer writes according to specifications which can be subtly tempting when the writer himself is committed to them as a citizen ... [There is] the patriotic [view] in which the writer

> becomes the voice of nationhood and the achievement of an Indian writer for example, is judged by the intensity of his Indianness [Quoted in *Considerations* ed Mukherjee, 1964; 1)

Different writers respond to these pulls and pressures in different ways, according to diverse cultural locations and ideological positions, but certain common themes emerge in most of South Asian literature in English : the colonial and East-West encounter, the development of a sense of pride in one's own culture, a preoccupation and experimentation with language and a continuing concern with issues of identity and nationhood. Some of the best South Asian fiction in English by Rushdie (See *Midnight's Children*, 1981), Amitava Ghosh (*The Shadow Lines*, 1988) and Michael Ondaatje (*The English Patient*, 1992) reflect and refract these urgencies and preoccupations.

4.2 SURVEY OF SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

In this section, I will briefly survey Pakistani and Sri Lankan literature in English before going on to deal with Indian-English writing. The South Asian region is where English has been more prominent than elsewhere; moreover, the use of English has not been confined to the practical spheres alone, but has been the literary vehicle for some of the best writings from this region.

4.2.1 Pakistani Literature in English

In his address to the International Conference on English in South Asia (January, 1989), Alamgir Hashmi pointed out that English in Pakistan had come to South Asia as the colonizer's language, and had subsequently acquired local "traits, a local habitation and a name" (Hashmi, 1996, 107). In fact, the first published book in English by a South Asian was *Travels* (1794) by an Indian Muslim Sake Deen Mohammed. During the early twentieth century, there were notable writers like Shahid Suhrawady, Mohammad Iqbal and Ahmed Ali.

In the field of poetry, there was an attempt to weld South Asian epic traditions with those of Romanticism. In the 1930s, Shahid Suhrawady's poetic compositions like *Essays in Verse* (1937), drawing on the precision of Muslim art and often on English neo-classicism, could be seen as evolving a character of its own.

In the field of prose writing around the same time, Ahmed Ali had introduced concepts of European realism into his Urdu stories and revolutionized Urdu literature. He then wrote *Twilight in Delhi*, the first major Muslim novel to emerge from the subcontinent. Developments in Pakistani writing after 1947 illustrate the fact that Pakistani literature has outstripped its colonial origins and developed a new personal identity of its own. This is amply evident in the poems of Taufiq Rafat, Daud Kamal, Kaleem Omar and Maki Qureshi who laid the groundwork for Pakistani poetry in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the field of novel writing, the writings of Ahmed Ali, Zulfikar Ghose, Salman Rushdie and Bapsi Sidhwa "has swayed postcolonial fictional modes from realism to fantasy and metafictional language myths" (Hashmi, 1996, p.114). Sidhwa's novels are *The Bride* (1983), *The Crow Eaters* (1978) and *Ice Candy Man* (1988), the last of which won several awards including the German Liberature Prize (`1991) and the 1993 Lila Wallace Grant. Notable recent novels from Pakistan include *The Thirteenth House* (1987) by Adam Zameenzad where desire is mixed with horror, astrology and mysticism with history. Also worthy of mention are Tariq Ali's novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) and Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1990), which is part memoir, part fiction and which won the Pushcart Prize, Nadeem

Aslam's *Season of the Rainbirds* which won the Betly Trask Award and was nominated for several others and Mohsin Hamid's *Mothsmoke* (2000). Zulfikar Ghose's novels include *Figures of Enchantment* (1986), a superb postcolonial novels, *Holme's Investigations into the Bogart Script* (1981) and *The Triple Mirror of the Self* (1992), among others. His works assert "language as the only tangible reality, and fiction as an ironic history of self and society" (Hashmi, 1996, 114) Short fiction and nonfiction have also been prolific genres in the hands of new writers like Aamer Hussein, Muneeza Shamsie and Rukhsana Ahmed.

In Pakistan, English drama has had a limited tradition as an art form. It is significant that the few well-known Pakistani English dramatists have all established themselves in Britain. Notable among them are Hanif Kureshi whose screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette* deals with unemployment and racism in Britain and was followed soon after by *The Buddha of Suburbia* which was a novel about an Asian boy growing up in Britain. The work of Rukhsana Ahmad and Tariq Ali also thematise the East-West encounter. The former's writing also carries a strong feminist theme, which was in part a response to the imposition of a new martial law regime in the 1970s.

Otherwise original plays in Pakistan have been few and far between. Among the most noteworthy is Taufiq Rafat's 'The Foothold' which was entirely in verse. Muneeza Shamsie relates that after the 1970s some playwrights like Imran Aslam made a conscious decision to write plays in Urdu partly to reach a wider audience and partly because they were a little embarrassed at the 'elitist' connotations of English.

Though the tyrannical nature of some of Pakistan's governments has not been conducive to freedom of expression in any language, the quality of writing on the whole has definitely "improved in the passage from colonial subservience to an era of national self-definition" (Hashmi, 1996, 111).

4.2.2 Sri Lankan Literature in English

Sri Lanka had been under the domination of the Portugese (1505-1640), the Dutch (1640-1796) and the British from 1796 until 1948, when it gained freedom on 4 February, 1948. Sri Lanka is linked to the South Asian region by strong ties of history, culture, religion, language and literature. Like in other colonized areas, the early literature from Sri Lanka in English show the limitations of emulation and blind imitation. This is mirrored in the poetic career of James Alwis who gained proficiency in Sinhalese when he realized that mastery over English would hardly redeem him from slavery.

In the field of Sri Lankan literature, there seems to be an abiding preoccupation with the language of poetry, especially so when that language has been acquired in a colonial situation. "However", as Gooneratne points out, it "is also part of a wider concern, a search for identity within the national and cultural environment." (Gooneratne, 1980, p.168)

The writer in Sri Lanka faces the problem of a limited readership/audience and has thus to write with an eye on an international / overseas reader / audience. The prickly problem of the English-language writer's relationship with his chosen language informs a lot of Sri Lankan poetry. However, instead of the initial pale imitations of Wordsworth and Moore, Sri Lankan poetry has evolved a vigorous local idiom of its own. Thus, from Louis Nell and Ashley Halpe to Patrick Fernando, we move to Lakdasa Wikkramasinhe, Anne Ranasinghe, the hallmark of whose poetry is a "perceptible freedom to experiment with language in terms of individual experience", and to "look with fresh eyes at a local society and environment." (Gooneratne, 1980, p.165). The experience of relocation and expatriation among many Sri Lankan writers in the 1950s and 1960s served to foreground questions of personal identity and themes of nostalgia and exile. In the poems of recent expatriates, there is a sense in which the act of departure has sealed their identity and made that identity a

heightened reality. Also, the violence and strife that has marked Sinhalese society in the last thirty years has found its way into its poetry as well.

Sri Lankan theatre in English took several years before it was able to develop an English language drama which could successfully exploit the resources of the local idiom. Attempts were made to adopt European plays by the University Dramatic Society under Professor E.F.C. Ludowyk in the 1940s, but these attempts could not establish a successful dramatic tradition subsequently. It was only with Ernest McIntyre's production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and later Shakespeare's *Othello* that a connection was established between the worlds of Sinhalese and European drama (Gooneratne, 1980, p156). At the same time, there is a tradition of domestic comedy in English which comprises plays like Ludowyk's 'He Comes from Jaffna' (1950), Lanerolle's 'Well, Mudaliyar' and McIntyre's 'The Education of Miss Asia' (1971) and 'The President of the O.B.A.

Any mapping of the terrain of the Sri Lankan novel starts paradoxically with the work of an Englishman Leonard Woolf, whose work *A Village in the Jungle* (1913) demonstrated its closeness to the local idiom and to the habitual rhythms of Sinhalese expression. It has since been translated into Sinhalese as Baddeganna.

In the last two decades or so, the novels of writers like Romesh Gunashekhara (*Reef, Sandglass*) and Michael Ondaatje have enriched Sri Lankan English fiction. Originally from Sri Lanka, Ondaatje's roots are of mixed Dutch, Tamil and Sinhalese elements. After his education in England, he settled in Canada. A sense of the transcultural informs most of his work, communicated through these of migration. international displacement or the personal search for his family's past. (*The English Patient* (1992), *Running in the Family* (1983), *Handwriting* and *Anil's Ghost.*) The theme of the mapping countries and experience across cultural boundaries is a key aspect in Ondaatje's work, a feature that can be called a characteristic of transcultural writing.

4.2.3 Bangladeshi Writing in English

Bangladesh became a separate entity after 1971, when it declared its independent status vis-à-vis Pakistan. Bangladesh has had a rich tradition of Bengali literature, which is its common heritage with West Bengal; in addition there has been a tradition of Bangla Muslim writing best represented by Kazi Nazrul Islam. In recent years the writings of Taslima Nasreen have been accorded international recognition, but her works like *Lajja*, her autobiography and newspaper columns are noteworthy not so much for their artistic merit as for their hardhitting polemic against repressive ideologies.

4.2.4 Indian Literature in English

In order to contextualise modern Indian poetry in English, it is illuminating to look at Bruce King's comment on the same.

> Modern Indian English–language poetry is one of the many 'new literatures' which began to emerge at the end of the Second World War after the end of colonialism. Unlike the creative writing of Africa and the Caribbean, modern Indian poetry in English has been neglected by most critics, foreign readers and intellectuals for it has no obvious direct relationship to the cultural movements which led to national independence; by 1947 the situation had changed and with it the concern of the new poets became their relationship to end alienation from the realities of their society.(King, 1987, p.1)

By the 1960s, the pioneering efforts of Ezekiel and some others, published first in magazines like '*Illustrated Weekly*' and '*Quest*' and then by Writers Workshop had borne fruit. Poets like Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Gieve Patel and Adil Jussawala had made a mark with their poetry. Most of these poets have continued to write well into the 1980s and 1990s. Ramanujan's (d.1993) last work '*The Black Hen*' published as Book IV of the '*Collected Poems*' (1995) concerns itself with poetic themes of roots, heredity and ancestry. Ezekiel's '*Latter Day Psalms*' (1982) and 'Poems' (1983-88) show an increasing use of the dramatic mode in place of his earlier theme of failure, which led to a sense of self-doubt and self-laceration in some of his early poetry. Dom Moraes's poems span more then the quarter of a century; '*John Nobody*' was published in 1965, '*Serendip*' (1990) and '*Craxton*' in the 1990s. *Gieve Patel*, similarly published his poems in 1966 and his latest collection '*Mirrored Mirroring*' in 1991. International recognition came by way of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize to Arun Kolatkar for '*Jejuri*' (1976). The writings of Parthasarathy, Arvind K. Mehrotra, Dilip Chitre and later Keki Daruwalla ('*Winter Poems*', 1980, '*Landscape*', 1987; '*A Summer of Tigers*', 1995, '*Night River*, 200) Shiv K. Kumar ('Trapfalls in the Sky, 1986, Woolgathering, 1998) and Jayanta Mahapatra (8 volumes of poetry from 1980 to 1997) convey a maturity of vision and deftness of execution that have helped establish India-English poetry as a distinct genre. In the last few decades and especially in the 1990s, some women have also emerged as poets of considerable distinction. Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza, Sujata Bhatt and Meena Alexander are some of the better known names. Indian-English poetry, to the extent one can homogenise the category inspite of the diverse voices that constitute it, has made a distinct place for itself in modern Indian culture, As Bruce King comments in his introduction to Indian English Poetry.

> Indian English poetry is part of the process of modernization which includes urbanization, industrialization, mobility, independence, social change, increased communication (in the form of films, television, radio, journals and newspapers), national and international transportation networks, mass education and the resulting paradox that as an independent culture emerges it also participate in the international, modern, usually westernized world. (King, 1987, p3).

If, initially, Modern Indian English verse appeared to be indebted to British and a few European models, it now reveals an awareness of most of world literature, including contemporary American, recent South American and older Indian devotional verse in the regional languages (ibid, p.5).

Further, English has become one of the most significant languages of modern India in which "words and expression" have recognized national rather than imported significances and references, alluding to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling (ibid, p.3).

> Thus, in 'An Introduction', Kamala as sums up the Indo-English writers' dilemma : "..... I am Indian, very brown, born / in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in / Two, Dream in one. Don't write in English, they said, / English is not your mother-tongue.....Why not let me speak in / any language I like ? The language I speak / becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses, / All mine, mine alone....."

The story of the growth of Indo-English drama highlights several significant aspects about culture, language and the nature of dramatic and theatrical activity. Nineteenth century attempts to stage and adapt English plays gradually lost out to regional language drama in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. (See Naik, 1984, p.153). While Shakespearean and western drama have often been successfully welded with local folk traditions (e.g., 'Jatra', Nautanki') and performed in the regional languages, drama in English in India has been restricted to a limited urban audience. The names

of Asif Currimbhoy and now Mahesh Dattani are the few well-known names in the field, in contrast to regional language drama which boasts of a whole lot of names like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Habib Tanvir and Badal Sircar. In order for India-English drama to be effective, it has to derive its impetus and strength from traditional Indian forms. The Indo-English dramatists' continuing attempt must be to locate and successfully use such indigenous traditions.

4.2.5 Twentieth Century Developments in Indian English Fiction

Questions and problems of address, language and 'Indianness' persist and percolate through to the twentieth century novel as well, and are articulated in Raja Rao's preface to *Kanthapura* (1938), a novel dealing with the impact of Gandhian thought upon a community. Since the narrator is an old unlettered woman, Rao uses English with the cadences and rhythms of Indian speech. In the Preface, which foregrounds the postcolonial problematic, Rao confesses:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language (pp i-ii) (*Kanthapura*, 1938)

Unlike an earlier generation of writers like Bankim and Govardhanram Tripathi, (who wrote his novel *Saraswatichandra* (1887-1900) in Gujarati and his personal notebooks in English) and Ngugi later who took a decision in the light of his political commitment to write in his native Gikuyu, as a way out of the impasse between expressing African realities in the English language, Rao continued to write in English. In his refusal to relinquish English as the medium of his stories, since 'it is not really an alien language' he exemplifies a turn of phrase that is distinctive and unique. His dictum that "We cannot write like the English... We should not. We cannot write only as Indians" shows a way out from the problem of alienation of the earlier writers. Arguably, it also carves a space for him, which is relatively independent of the burden of cultural representation.

In the hands of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, Indo-English fiction made significant generic leaps forging an idiom of its own, gaining momentum with the socio-political urgencies of the freedom movement and the impact of Gandhian thought. Mulk Raj Anand's novels are infused by a progressive humanitarianism. His considerable oeuvre includes *Coolie* (1933), *Untouchable* (1935), The *Village* (1939) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and is informed by an ardour for social reform and a conviction of salvation through socialistic doctrine. While it should not be assumed that a novel or a novelist operates in an ideologically neutral space, Anand's fervent ideological beliefs, and overt socialism sometimes result in technical and artistic flaws, like in *Untouchable* and *The Sword and the Sickle* (where the protagonist Lallu meets the Mahatma). Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), mentioned earlier, also shows the author's ideological affinity with Gandhian beliefs. Rao's later book *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), depicts the classic encounter between East and West in the marriage of Rama, the Indian student and Madeline, a Frenchwoman. The novel – if it can be so called with its massive overlay of philosophy – is infused with a belief in non-dualistic vedantic doctrine and shows the contrast between two contrary world-views.

The third major writer of this period, also well received in the West, is R.K. Narayan. Unlike Rao, the East-West theme is lacking in his work; unlike the earlier two authors, his 'Gandhian' novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* is considered his weakest. His manifold talents lie elsewhere in crafting a picture / version of Indian life in English unsurpassed in its authenticity and social realism. From *Swami and Friends* (1935) to *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) to *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) he offers a minutely observed account of the fictional 'Malgudi', a glimpse which is representative more than panoramic.

In the fifties and sixties, novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sahgal and later, Arun Joshi and particularly Anita Desai are significant figures; G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatter* (1948) and Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) are significant landmarks in the literary landscape. In reading these authors, we must be sensitive to questions of language and address, identity and nationality.

I am aware that a summing up of this kind excludes more writers and issues than it addresses. However, in order to convey some of the salient issues of the newly-emerging literatures of South Asia, I have chosen the Indian English novel as a representative genre within this larger group.

It is in the eighties and nineties – the last twenty years – that the Indian novel has made a phenomenal impact globally, with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), considered the model postcolonial novel, a national allegory that has influenced a whole generation of writers and created a horizon of expectations for readers and critics alike. In the novel, Rushdie seems to celebrate the plenitude of India in what can be labeled as the postmodernist mode, challenging several assumptions about language, nation, history and narrative.

As Meenakshi Mukherjee comments on the impact of *Midnight's Children*:

> In retrospect, we see that *Midnight's Children* had a very important role to play in the reversal of the 'centre-periphery' paradigm in English literary culture, in dissolving the great tradition of F.R. Leavis into a plurality of traditions coming from many races, many regions, many cultures ... Although in an entirely different way from the earlier novels, *Midnight's Children* is also constructing the idea of the nation – an India that is inclusive and tolerant but threatened by the bleak forces of binary opposition. (Mukherjee, 2000 pp 76-77).

This novel expresses deep anxiety about the fragility of the nation and the fluidity of identity. The preoccupation with nation, identity, memory and violence has continued to be a seminal one in South Asian subcontinental writing. The making of the nation ruptured by Partition and communal riots, events which bring home to individuals and collectivities the significance of religious and cultural identity are further thematized in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*.

In Ghosh's novel, the unnamed narrator, through the experiences of his mentor, Tridib, realizes the illusory and insecure nature of borders and boundaries as invented corollaries of the idea of nationhood. Thus, instead of securing borders through acts of military violence, there is a desire to transcend nationalism to go beyond to an understanding of internationalism and global humanitarianism.

At the same time, we need to look at the category of globalism closely. To what extent is globalism the prerogative of a few privileged individuals or the privilege of an internationally recognized category of writers and intellectuals? It is here that the Indian writer in English employing pan-Indian themes and addressing an international audience has an advantage over the writings of his/her regional counterparts, whose work may not be globally accessible in English. Such a writer, especially if he / she is a migrant – witness the case of Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje or even a Bharati Mukherjee – belongs to what Timothy Brennan calls the 'Third world Cosmopolitans' who are hailed by prominent critics as interpreters and authentic voices of the 'Third World'. Underlying this phenomenon is obviously the operation of a canon. Literary texts get canonized in different ways – by being discussed and praised by influential critics, by being mentioned in histories of literature, by being taught in classrooms and through an accretion of commentary around them.

(Mukherjee, 2000 p 3) In stark contrast to the proliferation of Indian English fiction in the late twentieth century, Indian English novels of the nineteenth century have not been subjected to any of these canonizing processes and have, as a result, been denied literary history, or even archival value.

The growing visibility and presence of the Indian English novel now is tied up, to a large extent, with the increasing influence of postcolonial theory and 'third world' intellectuals on the American academy. The increasing numbers of the 'Third World' cosmopolitan intellectuals in the U.S. universities has helped in the dissemination and circulation of theories based on newly emerging literatures in English from former colonies. What makes intellectuals like Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak and Homi Bhabha successful is their "mastery over the current idiom of the metropolitan metalanguage of narrative". This ensures their "favourable reception in the global centers of publication and criticism." However, not all writers from other cultures, obviously, receive this attention. While this new receptivity in London or New York may have "made it easier for some writers from outside the Western world to get a hearing, they may do so only within a field of reception already defined by metroplitan parameters and agendas". (Mukherjee, 2000, 179) In other words, the criteria of evaluating the standards of literary production are constructed and determined by the needs and demands of the receiving culture, that is, western universities.

One implicit expectation from Third World 'Commonwealth' (the earlier term) and postcolonial writers is that their work would inevitably highlight the experience of colonialism as theme or metaphor – as Rushdie did in the Methwold section of the *Midnight's Children* or Naipaul in 'The Shorthills Adventure in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. For all their undeniable literary value, the terms of their critical reception in the West embody the operation of a certain politics of representation that is heightened by the diasporic location of author and critic In spite of their use of English with a small 'e' and forging of an indigenous literary idiom, the Empire need not always write back. The writer's address might not, necessarily, be to the metropolitan centre and colonialism might no longer be the central issue in the newly emergent literatures, which may be conditioned by other local, diverse and complex pressures like the disintegration of older social orders and challenges posed to patriarchy, particularly by the newly emergent articulate woman. As an example, it is only in the late nineteen-nineties that the rich literature of partition, both written and oral, is being looked at. The right critical and aesthetic distance from the event fifty years later seems to have helped evolve the right perspective, resulting in the production and translation of literary classics on partition.

One of the issues raised by the questions of classics, especially at the level of reception, is the question of the "timeless universals" of the "great tradition" of literature, the canon. Academic discussions about interrogating and replacing the canon result in the establishment of a counter canon where certain known names are repeatedly anthologized and showcased under the titles of South Asian, African or Caribbean literatures, with the editors of these collections doing a token updating every few years.

Not only that, it is these anthologies in circulation, which often introduce virtually monolingual or monocultural (having access to one literature) students in South Asian and non-western universities to their own literature. What we have to do here is to interrogate the pedagogic hegemony of postcolonialism currently in circulation in English departments in the U.S. universities which, then, becomes a model here.

4.3 POSTCOLONIALISM

4.3.1 Unraveling Postcolonialism

Like the earlier term 'Commonwealth' to describe emerging literatures in English, the term 'postcolonial' etymologically indicates its emphasis as a continuing preoccupation with colonialism as the major cultural experience of the century.

Postcolonial analysis is concerned with the material, cultural and intellectual impact of British rule, introduction of Western forms of knowledge and its immediate and continuing effect on the colonised societies. In addition, the impact of the colonizing process on the coloniser has also been looked at by writers like Frantz Fanon and Ashis Nandy.

Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* (1978), in many senses the basic text and reference point for postcolonialism, was a 'canonical event' in terms of its revolutionary impact on "intellectual formation, structures and lives both in the west and in the postcolonial non-west." (Gandhi, 1998, 66) It changed the drift of many disciplines, expanding and re-visioning their scope and intent (Brannon, 1992, 98). *Orientalism* is a systematic painstaking exposition of the reciprocal relationship between colonial knowledge and colonial power. What is new in *Orientalism's* method of exposition is its unrelenting focus on literature, and it is this aspect that I am stressing on as particularly relevant to our field of study. As Leela Gandhi points out in her introduction to postcolonial theory:

> Despite its interdisciplinary concerns, the field of postcolonial studies is marked by a preponderant focus upon 'postcolonial literature' - a contentious category which refers somewhat arbitrarily to 'literatures in English', namely, to those literatures which have accompanied the projection and decline of British imperialism. (Gandhi, 1998, 141)

The focus on literature in postcolonialism as a mode of cultural production is a corollary to the cultural hegemony of British imperialism/colonialism which can be described as a "textual takeover" (Boehmer, 1995, 94). Macaulay's *Minute* emphasises the value of English literature as an instrument of cultural domination, which was made "central to the cultural enterprise of Empire". (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 3)

Gauri Vishwanathan's *Masks of Conquest* (1989) views the literary text as a "mask for economic exploitation" which "successfully camouflages the material activities of the coloniser" (Vishwanathan, 1989, 20). In memorizing passages from literary and poetical texts, the colonial subject was indoctrinated into complete subordination. However, in different ways, Said, Vishwanathan and Ashcroft etal may be seen as subscribing to the idea of a total conquest. There is a subtle shift of focus to forms of response and resistance in later postcolonial theorizing.

Much of postcolonial theory ignores the "theoretical self-sufficiency of African or Asian knowledge systems"; it also shows a failure to "foreground those cultural and historical conversations which circumvent the Western World". (Gandhi, 1998, Preface) Some of the problems of postcolonial theory and concomitantly, postcolonial literary analysis are outlined in the following sections.

4.3.2 Postcolonial Literary Analysis and Pedagogy

A critique of postcolonialism from our point of view would involve a brief look at the implications for reading and teaching initiated by postcolonialism. Postcolonial literary analysis has effected radically revisionist readings of canonical classics like Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Instead of naturalizing the eternal beauties of the colonial canon, postcolonial pedagogical practice "addresses questions arising from the apparent discrepancy between the antagonistic worlds of the colonial text and the postcolonial classroom." (Gandhi, 1998, 146) This takes the form of consciousness - raising whereby the student is encouraged to read against the grain of earlier critical ideas like authorial intention and universal meanings. Further, an attempt is made to historicize the received curriculum, with a view to revealing "imperialism's shaping hand in the formation of English studies". (Vishwanathan, 1989, 167)

Much of postcolonial literary theory's oppositional and specifically anticolonial thrust were anticipated by the contentious concerns of Ngugi wa Thiong'o as early as 1968, when he and his colleagues challenged the dubious cultural and pedagogical pre-eminence of English within a decolonised African context. In a paper entitled 'On the Abolition of the English Department' (Ngugi, 1972) a move discussed ever since in varying climes and places, he proposed that the 'unauthentic discourse of Englishness be replaced by a radical centralization of African literature and language (Gandhi, 1998, 151). In the context of colonial India, Mahatma Gandhi's total rejection of English education and belief in the legitimate cultural primacy of Indian literatures and language, is comparable. He realised that English has created a gulf between the educated classes and the masses, and called for a rejection of "their civilization", since it is this that "makes their presence in India possible." (M.K. Gandhi, 1938, 66)

Gandhi's assertion may be seen as an example of a refusal or rejection of the categories of the imperial culture. This refusal is more than a gesture of nationalist assertion; it constitutes a radical interrogation of the bases and philosophical assumptions of European and British metaphysics. (Ashcroft, 1989, 33) At the same time, at another level, problems with English as the medium of instruction persist. In a recent issue of *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)* (July 28-August 3, 2001 - Vol.xxxvi No.30), an article on the 'Politics of Development in Postcolonial India' discusses the social fracturing caused by English medium education. As a marker of class privilege, English education becomes a terrain of struggle and results in increasing polarization, fracturing and violence along class, caste, religious and gender lines (David Faust, Richa Nagar, *EPW*).

More productive from the point of view of postcolonial analysis are the textual strategies of subversion and appropriation. One example of this is exemplified in Raja Rao's 'Preface' to *Kanthapura* (1938) mentioned earlier. In R.K. Narayan's *The English Teacher* (1946), the eponymous hero Krishna rebels against the methods of English teaching calling it a "whole century of false education", but venerates English literature: "What fool could be insensible to Shakespeare's sonnets or 'The Ode to the West Wind?" (Narayan, 1946, 220-1)

The task of the postcolonial critic and teacher, in the face of the "veneration" mentioned above, would be to prise open the complicit relations between imperialism, language and literature. The first step in demonstrating the politics of representation implicated in such a project would be to problematise the retention and continuance of the study of British literature in post-Independence India. The *Lie of the Land* (edited R. Sunder Rajan), and *Rethinking English* (edited Svati Joshi) are valuable critical interventions in such a process. At the same time, some of the newly emerging literatures/ works in English can be seen as produced, by in some sense, and having a dialogic relationship with the agenda outlined above. The nuanced, gender / class / caste inflected depiction of the Syrian Christian community in Arundhati Ray's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is a case in point. Similarly, the complex representation of the colonial Indian army in South Asia (Burma and Malaysia) is interwoven with a history of teak and the closing years of Burma's last king to form the warp and weft of Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000), one of the most well-researched works to emerge from the Indian subcontinent in recent years.

Ideally speaking, the task of a postcolonial pedagogy would be to retrieve, legitimize and provide a basis for knowledge systems which have been suppressed because they were not in alliance with the dominant political interest. In addition, such a pedagogy should be able to unravel and unmask the nexus of power and knowledge which supported the imperial project. It would be appropriate, in this context, to quote Stuart Hall's description of what the cultural studies project had set out to do:

> .....When cultural studies began its work ... it had ... to undertake the task of unmasking what it considered to be the unstated presuppositions of the humanist tradition itself. It had to bring to light the ideological assumptions underpinning the practice, to expose the educational program ... and to try and conduct an ideological critique of the way the humanities and the arts presented themselves as parts of disinterested knowledge. (Hall, 1990, 15)

However, while postcolonial theory highlights the duplicities and inconsistencies between western humanist traditions and our colonial histories, it has its blind spots as well. Some of these concerns are briefly indicated in the next section.

4.3.3 Problems with the Postcolonial Paradigm

The problems or limitations of the postcolonial paradigm are partly due to the empowered context of the postcolonial intellectual, a fact mentioned earlier. The circulation of high theories by diasporic intellectuals often occupying certain institutional privileges results in a gap between postcolonial theory and actual ground realities of the developing countries of South Asia or Africa. Critics like Arif Dirlik and Aizaz Ahmad are unrelenting in their exclusion of all theoretical / intellectual activity which lacks adequate referents to 'everyday' sociality (Gandhi, 1998, 56). Ahmad also targets the postcolonial preoccupation with questions regarding the formation of subjectivities as a solipsistic preoccupation with a "play of identities" which obscure the 'real' politics of the collectivity (Ahmad, 1995, 13) Similarly, in an article titled 'The Postcolonial aura: third world criticism in the age of global capitalism', Dirlik argues that the predominantly "epistemological and psychic orientations of postcolonial intellectual" are ethically incompatible with and irrelevant to the "problems of social, political and cultural domination" (Dirlik, 1994, 331, quoted in Gandhi, 1998, 57)

What are the implications of postcolonialism's occasional shortsightedness for newly emerging literatures in English? Depending on the positions from where the oppositional critiques emanate—Marxists and socialist feminists lay more stress on class while psychoanalytic feminists primary focus is on gender and sexuality—the focus of postcolonial theorizing become obvious.

It is with some of these excluded marginal areas that I would be dealing with in the last section.

4.4 LITERATURE AT THE MARGINS - SOME CRITICAL ASPECTS

4.4.1 The Question of the Margin

The notion of the excluded margin involves a certain political relationship between the centre and periphery highlighted by the French critic Foucault's observation that:

> One must not suppose that there exists a certain sphere of 'marginality' that would be the legitimate concern of a free and disinterested scientific inquiry were it not the object of mechanisms of exclusion brought to bear by the economic or ideological requirements of power. If 'marginality' is being constituted as an area of investigation, this is only because relations on power have established it as a possible object... (quoted in Gandhi, 98, 55)

The postcolonial academic is co-opted into accepting the very process of marginalisation he/she should be resisting. One area where the discourse of

marginality is constantly pushing against its limits is in the terrain of women and literature. In fact, feminist criticism has radically interrogated the notion of marginality, viewing it as a patriarchal ploy to invisiblise and suppress women's writings and to render them invisible.

4.4.2 Women and Literature

The location of women in literature and the relation of women and literature is a complex one in our culture. Women become the site in literature of the colonial period, on which the symbolic dramatization of an incipient nationalism, the questions and anxieties of Indianness and of colonial modernity, are enacted. Bimala in Tagore's *The Home and the World.* (1915, translated, 1919), Savithri in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and even Ila in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) embody collective cultural anxieties. The relationship women bear to newly emerging national literatures is both metaphoric (analogical) and metonymic (representative). In addition, as symbolic repositories of tradition and maternal nature and nurture, women are often identified with a traditional, and backward-looking nationalism (McClintock, 1993, 66). Thus, Bimala in Tagore's novel becomes the battleground for conflicting notions of liberal humanism or civic nationalism, on the one hand, and ethnic nationalism or fundamentalism, on the other. Even the clash of cultures in Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is conveyed through the contrasting figures of Madeleine and Savithri; on another plane, the collapse of community and identity is powerfully depicted through the changing fortunes of Ayah in Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*.

Sangari and Vaid in *Recasting Women* (1989) have elaborated the implications of deep - rooted and widespread changes in the cultural (social-economic-domestic-conjugal) formations of colonial India in reformulating patriarchies and effecting structural shifts in social arrangements. It is in this moment of challenge to prevailing socio-cultural arrangements that much of the 'new' literatures had their origin, as I have mentioned in the first section.

Since men were in the public domain and subject to colonial control, (see Partha Chatterjee, 1986, 1992) women were often the conduit to express their anxieties over their discrepant dislocations. How women bore the brunt of masculine anxieties and yet managed to clear and create a space of their own through writing is related by Tharu and Lalitha in *Women Writing in India* (2 vols., 1991)

Although women had no direct access to English education till early twentieth century, they were often encouraged to learn English privately or read English literature in translation. Thus, English literature was not an entirely unknown entity among upper class educated women in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. Tharu and Lalitha's archival work also unearthed considerable evidence to prove the existence of indigenous traditions of women's writing that "emerge at the contested margins of patriarchy, empire and nation". (Tharu and Lalitha, 1991, Pref xvii) There are complexities in the cultural fabric that must be considered, for example, the politics of canon building or the tension between public and private realities, to fully appreciate cultural context in which women write. If we look at the contexts and politics of women's writing and its reception in India and elsewhere, certain processes of censorship, and suppression become evident. In the context of a national colloquium on censorship, held in Hyderabad in July, 2001, Ammu Joseph distinguishes between censorship by mob or street censorship and official or state censorship, on the one hand, and the more subtle forms of censorship, often rooted in gender, that stifle creativity, on the other. (The Hindu, July 15) Often this censorship is self-imposed, in order to negotiate the patriarchal restraints of everyday life.

Novelists like Shashi Deshpande (b. 1938) and Anita Desai (b.1937) have thematised the middle class woman's predicament by foregrounding the tensions between inherited traditions and a newly articulated selfhood. The realities of gender

violence, rigid norms of female behaviour and constant suppression of female desire underpin novels like *That Long Silence, The Darkness Holds no Terrors* (Deshpande) and Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Roy's novel, in fact, breaks the silence on race, class and gender in a manner reminiscent of Greek tragedy. Further, these gaps and silences, in a sense, should underwrite our recognition of the fact that it is not only women, but other subaltern groups - like dalits in India or aboriginal natives in Australia - who have been relegated to the margins of national cultures or literatures.

With the emergence of fundamentalism and fascism, almost all over the world in the 1990s, it is crucial to go beyond nationalisms to perceive the constructedness of the categories of literature and genre. Received notions of literature or genre often act as limiting frames or fixes, which are inadequate to represent the varieties of newly emerging literatures all over the world.

One function of the newly emerging literatures is to constantly interrogate, challenge and extend the categories of literature. Women's writing, however, has contested its marginal position to emerge as central to literature. Some feminist criticisms, have highlighted the constructedness (by patriarchy) of the category of literature and literary meaning and have expanded our understanding of these categories.

4.4.3 Conceptual Challenges

"The interaction of 'English' (Ashcroft et al., 1989, 181) writing with the older traditions of orature or literature in postcolonial societies, and the emergence of a writing which has as a major aim the assertion of social and cultural difference, have radically questioned easy assumptions about the characteristics of the genres we usually employ as structuring and categorizing literature as novel, lyric, epic, play, etc. Our sense, not only of that which ought to enter the canon, but also of what could be included under the rubric of 'literature', has been altered by writers writing in an inherited English language. (Ashcroft, 181). Contemporary Asian and African literatures, as a result of the vitality of their oral and performance traditions, have offered a number of alter/native ways of conceiving narrative structure. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) is again a good example of the use of oral narrative traditions where chronology, linearity and continuity are dispensed with and replaced with a digressive, looping narrative. Similarly, standard English is replaced with a kitschy, chutnified mix of colloquialness. In a three part essay titled 'Poles of Recovery'; From Dutt to (Nirad) Choudhary (Hindu, July 29, 2001) the noted writer Amit Chaudhuri makes a subtle point:

> English prose style, in the hands of writers like Chaudhury (who learnt English as a second language) and Naipaul, has been an instrument of ambivalence; neither of these two writers, among the greatest post-colonial stylists of English prose, come from the upper reaches of their respective societies. In Chaudhuri's hands, English prose style, becomes the measure of one who feels he does not quite belong .... On the other hand, Rushdie's "khichdi" prose, with its "Bombay mix" of Hindi, English and Indian English, is a hegemonic language ..... of an upper middle class generation in post-independence, post-liberalisation India ... this "khichdi" language is far from an African creole or pidgin, or being a language of the dispossessed.

It is thus from a privileged location that a Rushdie can put the claims of Indian writing in English, as superior to regional language writing. Many years ago in a Writers Workshop symposium, P. Lal, its founder, claimed:

> Without trying to be facetious I should like to suggest that only in English can the real Indian poetry be written; any other poetry is likely to be Bengali-slanted or Gujarati-based, and so on ..."

Possibly, one way of countering the hegemonic claims of Indian writers writing in English, is not to resist but to join them. It is in this that proliferating translations can be seen as a positive and enabling way to bridge the gap between a regional writer and a (inter) national audience. The choice between confining oneself to a limited audience / readership, and submitting to the publisher, market and readership is a difficult one for the writer, but one which has to be negotiated.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this overview of the Indo-Anglian novel as a representative body of South Asian writing, I have attempted to deal with some of the crucial critical issues of postcoloniality, canonicity and pedagogy, as central to the construction of literature. I have also suggested the significance of gender and class locations in determining the author's fictional aspirations and literary styles. Taken in conjunction with our knowledge of other literatures, this should furnish us with a clear picture of the issues at stake while approaching new literatures in English in South Asia and the developing world.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does the canon determine our idea of what constitutes literature? Discuss with examples.
2. Discuss the central issues in the emergence of South Asian literatures in English, using Indo-Anglian fiction as a point of entry.
3. What is the role of women's writing in newly emerging literatures?

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UNIT 5 AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE : INTERROGATING NATIONAL MYTHS

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 History and Identity
  5.2.1 Tracking the Course of Australian Studies
  5.2.2 Issues of a National Identity
5.3 National Myths and Contestations
  5.3.1 Constructing the National Image
  5.3.2 Contestations
5.4 Outside and Inside the Canon
5.5 Let Us Sum Up
5.6 Questions
5.7 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to introduce you to Australian Literature that some of you may be reading for the first time. We will, therefore, familiarize you with the geographical, socio-political and other contexts that shape the literature of this island-continent and the various kinds of writing that fall under its rubric. Your textual study within the scope of the course is confined to the study of a white canonical writer, Australia's Nobel Prize laureate, Patrick White, but it is important to learn that there is a wide body of literary creation in Australia today that includes Aboriginal, women's and immigrant writing. Besides, it is important to understand the history of the country and how it's changing dimensions have left an impact on the way national myths have been created and contested in the creative realm.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Australia, the smallest of continents, the largest of islands, fifth among the world's nations in area, had indigenous peoples living there for thousands of years before the British claimed the land as *terra nullius* - empty land - following Captain James Cook's invasion in 1788. It established a penal colony and named it New South Wales. Other colonies of the British empire were gradually added such as Tasmania (1825), Western Australia (1829), South Australia (1836), Victoria (1851) and Queensland (1859). They had their separate constitutions till January 26, 1901, when the several states decided to come together and form a federation under the Commonwealth of Australia.

For a long time the narration of the history of Australia began with Cook's invasion and the Aboriginal people were considered mere wards of the state rather than as full citizens in their own right. It was only in 1967, after a national referendum, where ninety percent of the white population voted in their favour, that the Aboriginal people got citizenship rights. Initially Australia followed a white-only immigration policy but the years from 1947 to 1964 witnessed a policy of assimilation of Chinese war refugees, for instance, and later of integration from 1964 to 1973. In 1973 the Whitlam government declared Australia as a multicultural society and ever since the country has tried to maintain that character in letter and spirit.

These changes in the national policies have had a decided impact on the way the history of Australia is being told and the literary voices that are gaining precedence in recent times. The starting points in the narration of the history of Australia no longer necessarily erase the Aboriginal narratives that existed before the arrival of the colonizers. What was originally presented in many mainstream white historical narratives as a peaceful settlement stands revealed as a traumatic invasion that led to the intentional and unintentional decimation of large numbers of Aborigines through conflict, disease and so-called welfare policies. The impact of later immigration policies on the socio-cultural atmosphere as well as the change in attitudes to women in Australian society too is being reflected in the literary canons of Australia. The changing demographic make-up Australia has introduced many counter-narratives that are challenging traditional national myths in some ways and endorsing new ones of a multicultural social milieu. These diverse voices especially of Aborigines, women and immigrants in Australia are rewriting the way Australia's national identity has been constructed.

5.2 HISTORY AND IDENTITY

5.2.1 Tracking the Course of Australian Literary Studies

Oral traditions within the Aboriginal as well as white settler communities of Australia formed the bedrock of early Australian writing. Oral forms such as Aboriginal song cycles, colonial ballads and bush songs were dominant influences that came to be part of the early written forms of the Australian nation and its cultural consciousness. At this formative stage of the Australian nation as we know it today, categories of writing that would not necessarily be considered 'literature' in the traditional sense—such as letters, journals and travelogues—formed a significant corpus of work that represented or gave insight into the construction of the sense of an Australian identity.

One issue central to this process of the construction of a national identity has been whether to adopt a stance of affiliation or difference vis-à-vis the British and European colonial models of literature and culture. The initial trend was to constantly either use the European models as a point of reference or comparison. However, convict and bush traditions, especially in short stories and ballads, culled out a more distinctive paradigm as they focused on the specific responses of the new denizens of the land to the natural and social environment of the Australian penal system and the outback. The thematic drift of writing falling within the convict traditions often focused on a sense of resistance to authority and the system, while that belonging to the tradition of the outback dwelt on the pioneering spirit of survival. To this period belongs the *Bulletin* school of writing which peaked in the 1880s. Writers like Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson, who belonged to this school, drew on these Australian nativist traditions in their verse and prose. They elevated the Australian Bush and the concept of mateship to cultural symbols and stood in distinction to colonial cultural values of the metropolitan centres in Europe. The wild environment of the Australian continent and the need this generated for the pioneers and bushmen to stick together in a strange sense of interdependence and egalitarianism became hallmarks of what it meant to be Australian to many.

In time the very Australian canon that had been used to forge a new identity of Australia distinct from its colonial legacy by white Australian writers came to be challenged for its conceptualization and presentation of a monolithic Australian identity. The fact that it favoured male white writers and excluded the voices of other sections of Australian society was seen as evidence of how it was replicating in many ways the same trends of the British canon that it had been trying to disassociate itself from. As a reaction to this, at one level the focus started to shift to representations of Australia by women writers such as Judith Wright, Barbara Bayton and Elizabeth Jolley. They revealed through their work that the conceptualisation of the Bush and mateship as symbols of Australianness had hitherto in either very prominent or subtle

ways excluded the role women played in the pioneering phase and in the later establishment of the nation. They also showed how from the their perspective these symbols had romanticized the settling of the Australian nation.

A new dimension to Australian studies was added in due course of time with indigenous writing being included in the purview of the Australian writing. Thus a growing body of Aboriginal writing came to be included and studied and this includes early versions and English translations of Aboriginal song sequences and folk tales. In some instances an indigenous word 'Koorie' is used to designate this literature. The publication and popularity since the 1960s of Kath Walker's poetry, the plays of Kevin Gilbert and Jack Davis, the novels of Colin Johnson, the autobiographical work of Ruby Langford, Sally Morgan and Glenyse Ward have proved the strong literary presence of Aboriginal voices in Australia. Their work revealed how what had been presented as the peaceful settling of the island-continent, had in fact been a very destructive and traumatic invasion and forced occupation of the Aboriginal spaces. This writing is directed at throwing light on these historical realities and situating the present position of Aborigines within that framework so that redressal can be made. The political and personal element in this kind of writing thus is very strong.

Another kind of writing that finds a place today in Australia is immigrant/diasporic writing and writers such as Judah Waten, David Martin, Dimitris Tsaloumas, Yasmine Gonneratne, Adib Khan, Satendra Nandan, Beth Yahp are just some of the representative figures in this field. Once again their writing is part of the steady flow of revisions to a simplistic conceptualization of the Australian identity. As the multicultural nature of Australia's population becomes politically and socioculturally accepted, these voices and what they have to say are gaining precedence.

As far as considerations of genre go, during the initial phase of literary production in Australia, forms or genres of literature that had strong roots in oral traditions held sway in a significant way. Thus poetry and ballads as well as short stories, which were the literary versions of the songs and fireside yarns formed a prominent segment of the literary output that came out especially during the period when the *Bulletin* had its heyday. 'Banjo' Paterson, A.D. Hope and Judith Wright are perhaps among the best known white proponents of the ballad and poetry genres. Paterson's 'Waltzing Matilda' is a ballad that has even attained the status of an unofficial national anthem. Early Aboriginal writing too had a strong poetic component. Kath Walker (later known as Oodheroo Nunukul) and Colin Johnson (later known as Mudrooroo) are the best known exponents in this area. The Jindyworobak movement founded by Rex Ingamells in the late 1930s deserves mention here as an attempt to bring together these two streams by appropriating or introducing elements of the Aboriginal traditions as understood by white writers, into their poetic practice.

In more recent times it is more difficult to traces trends in the field of poetry because of the proliferation of the variety of voices and themes in this field. The same applies to the other genres as well. While it was comparatively easy at one point in time to pick out a Henry Lawson or Barbara Bayton in the field of short stories, the academic resistance to canonization and the diversity of writers and texts makes that much harder today.

The genres of fiction and personal narratives, however, have grown from strength in Australia as they have in the rest of the world as well. Writers of fiction like Patrick White, Xavier Herbert and Randolph Stow have been followed by renowned writers such as David Malouf, Archie Weller and Thea Astley. Sally Morgan and Ruby Langford are two Aboriginal writers whose contributions to the genre of personal narratives have not only popularized the genre, but also given a broader audience to a perspective on Aboriginal issues in Australia. Th main thematic preoccupations remain intricately linked with the conception of the nation space. What has changed

is the diversity of perspectives brought to this and included within the purview of the Australian literature.

5.2.2 Issues of National Identity

We have already stated a few things about Australian literary history. In this section we will see how different sections of the Australian people have looked at these questions. The Bicentenary celebrations of 1988 raised questions about how the beginnings of 'Australia' as a nation have been portrayed in history, literature and popular culture. While for the white settlers of British origin it was a commemoration of the beginning of British colonial settlement two hundred years ago and, therefore, called 'Australia Day', for the Aborigines it meant destruction of their cultures, civilization and relationship with the land, and is, therefore termed 'Invasion Day'. To the former, it is marked by the need to create the myths of national foundation and beginnings that justify their presence on the island-continent. To the latter, it underscores the beginning of a history of loss and the need to question those myths of the Australian nation. The debate is part of a larger debate on the way national identity has been constructed in Australia. The fact that the Aborigines, their history, stories and their political positions have been successfully elided for so long has put a question mark on how and at what cost the Australian identity has been so constructed.

On account of the early history of convict transportation (about 1,50,000 who came in chains) the population comprised of those from the lower strata of British society and civil and military officials to administer the penal colony. The 'pioneers', those from the aristocracy who were free migrants and enjoyed the cultural benefits of education and higher social status focused on what was novel and curious for them, viz., the landscape and the flora and fauna, as well as the indigenous people of the land, that is, the Aboriginal people.

In terms of literary production it meant describing the strange sights and experiences through early journals, letters or other pieces of writing. With the beginning of the gold rush in 1851 resulting from the discovery near Bathurst being made public and subsequent discoveries at Clunes, Ballarat and Bendigo in the state of Victoria (capital Melbourne), intellectual and professional pursuits began to flourish in the cities. This raised a demand for popular literature though the early group of writers, mostly British born, wrote for the larger audience in Britain that enjoyed the exotic flavour of their works. Among this early group of writers who wrote about Australian life and landscape were Catherine Spence, Marcus Clarke and Boldrewood. While Catherine Spence occasionally had the cities as her theme, Marcus Clarke wrote about the penal system and Boldrewood had the Bush as his theme. It is the Bush theme that emerged as one of the important characteristics of Australian writing.

As the ideals of socialism, unionism and nationalism spread by 1890s and Federation took place in 1901, the year that was witness to "White Australia" legislation, the publication scene too changed. Journals and papers, such as *The Bulletin* and *the Worker*, were not tied to the metropolitan centre and catered more to the local reading public. Henry Lawson was a popular writer who published his prose and verse in *The Bulletin*. Angus and Robertson also started publication in 1895, starting with the publication of Banjo Paterson's *The Man from Snowy River*.

The Aboriginal people who had become dispossessed and diasporic in their own country took a long time to get together, after the 1960s only, and start working for a pan-Aboriginality, their people's common identity. This allowed the construction of an effective counter discourse, articulation of their 'Aboriginality' – their common identity. Thus they articulated an oppositional consciousness, a consciousness that defied the dominant white representations of, as Daylight and Johnstone suggest, one, science and anthropology, which saw them as primitive people; two, of law, which saw them as wards f the State rather than as citizens, three of religion, which saw

them as pagan or heathen. Thus an identity politics became possible. The focal point is the empirical experience and in written literature it takes on the extra dimension of linguistic representation. For example, Cliff Watego (1988), while explicating several socio-cultural questions behind the production of Aboriginal literature, begins by quoting Jack Davis:

> We used to speak in those days when we were talking about politics – black-politics – of how we were going to make ourselves heard within the white Australian society. And even in those days when we went back to our little dingy rooms, we said (referring to, among others, Kath Walker, Faith Bandler, and Ken Colbung), 'well we've got to write about this, we've got to tell the people'. (Watego 11)

Jack Davis is referring here to the 1960s – the time when leading black activists could strike a note of consensus to enlighten the white public about their grievances and aims through literature. Around the same time Kath Walker's first two volumes of poetry, *We are Going* (1964) and *The Dawn is at Hand* (1966), sold extremely well making her one of the highest selling poets in Australian history, and thus setting a promising example for other black writers to follow. This budding literary movement (which can also be seen as a supplementary system to the larger Aboriginal movement) gained further momentum in the year 1971 with the publication of Kevin Gilbert's *End of Dreamtime* which celebrated the very concept of *'Aboriginality'* and denounced white Australia for its maltreatment of the Aborigines. It is interesting to note here that most of these prominent literary figures were associated with the larger Aboriginal movement. Both Walker and Davis, for example, were associated with the efforts of Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), which spearheaded the Aboriginal movement throughout the 1960s. These people were also part of the famous Aboriginal tent 'embassy' set up in front of Parliament House in Canberra on Australia Day, 1972, to peacefully demonstrate and draw wider attention to the Aboriginal cause. This in turn directed attention at the way national identity was being envisaged. No longer could white Australia afford to ignore that it had a 'black' history in more ways than one. Just as the indigenous people of Australia are contesting the white identity of Australia, other groups are taking a look at national myths and pointing out how the constant need for revising them to incorporate the increasingly multicultural faces of Australian society.

5.3 NATIONAL MYTHS AND CONTESTATIONS

5.3.1 Constructing the National Image

Every nation constructs a national image through its histories, national traditions, myths and legacies. These are passed on through the popular consciousness and consistently reinforced by public institutions like and discourses such as literature, the media and academia. This construction of the national image is a long drawn out and subtle process. In Australia, though there were myths linked to the land of Aboriginal origin this was rarely incorporated in the narration of the nation. The predominant impulse in the earlier phase of Australia's history was to create a national image that set it apart from the colonial legacy of being a penal colony. The myth of settlement was a convenient national narrative that places under erasure both the Aborigines and the historical realities of the founding of the Australian nation. It valorized the spirit of the people, especially the men, who played a significant part in the founding of what was in time to evolve into the Australian nation.

Myths of the new land took formal literary shape by the end of the nineteenth century in the works of the early settlers. These sought to idealise the men and women who confronted the new environment, so different from what they were accustomed to in the Northern Hemisphere. Henry Lawson was a major figure who developed the

popular image of the Bush. He celebrated the spirit of the white bush folk but depicted the outback as bleak and unrelenting. This celebration was at the expense of the city though ironically it was often the city dwellers only who propagated this myth and used it to construct a national cultural identity that was different from the urban ethos celebrated by the imperial centre. The early ballads and stories presented the image of the traveling bushman, the figure of the Outback (the Australian word for remote settlement in the interiors of the land).

Also important in the formation of a national identity, different from that of Britain, was the Australian participation in World War I (1914 – 18) and the tragedy of Gallipoli. Many soldiers from Australia and New Zealand died in the tragedy of Gallipoli, The interwar years, the years of the great world Depression, left about one-thirds of the Australian workforce unemployed by 1931. This war marked a crucial point at which the umbilical cord linking the British imperial center and the Australian antipodes was severed. Following this there was a growing tendency to associate differently on the international front. World war II (1939 – 1945) brought the theatres of war closer to the Antipodes due to the threat from Japan and was another watermark in the nation's history. It accelerated industrialization and opened Australia to alliances with America and a growing awareness that it was part of Asia. The Vietnam War of 1965 brought together these trends and heralded the repercussions they would have for the nation and its construction of a national identity. The influx of immigrants from Southern Europe and South-East Asia that followed in the postwar years set the stage for a change towards a more multicultural paradigm of national consciousness and social policy.

5.3.2 Contestations

Two strong opposing impulses have been seen to pervade much of Australian literature and popular creation on account of this historical course in its attempts to establish a distinct identity. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra in their Preface to *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind* argue that Australia's postcoloniality itself is subject to debate. This is because it is a settler colony where the white settlers continue in some measure the colonial oppression and dispossession of the original inhabitants of the continent. At the same time it wishes at least in the public imagination to break free of the colonial seal and its allegiances.

> It is a lapsed colonial power locked in an unresolved and undeclared struggle with the original possessors for legitimacy and land, producing a neocolonial form of literature from a neocolonial mentality that is still obsessed with the exploited Other. Into this complex is embedded a flourishing oppositional postcolonial development in politics, culture and literature. (Hodge and Mishra xiv)

They discuss how this double-bind is part of the construction of the "Australian stereotype, the so-called 'typical Australian', and the 'typical' space that he occupies the Australian Bush, or outback" (xv). According to them the stereotype is a "Caucasian adult male, an itinerant rural worker of no fixed address". Though the values, language and cultural ethos of this stereotype are "widely claimed to represent Australian authenticity" and to be a "touchstone of Australian identity ... a yardstick of Australianness in literature and other arts, as though truly Australian literature should be written by, for and about this character"(xv). The fact that Banjo Patterson's bush song "Waltzing Matilda" – a ballad about a wandering swagman (farm worker) in the Australian outback which celebrates the spirit of survival in the harsh landscape and the bold pioneering spirit – is the unofficial national anthem of Australia is another pointer to this phenomenon.

The paradox they point out is that Australia is in reality a highly urbanized country where this figure is not and was not ever a truly representative figure. Hodge and Mishra estimate that this figure could never have constituted more than fifteen

percent of the population even in the heydays of the pioneering movement. And yet this, the figure that is at the center of the Bush myth, has become so central to much of traditional canonical Australian literature. This is the representative figure of Australia in the popular imagination. Examining this phenomenon they analyse the erasures it makes. Hodge and Mishra argue

> At the most superficial level, this figure exists to suppress from the national image recognition of what he isn't. He encodes a class, race and gender identity which classifies women, aborigines and new migrants as un Australian, a potent fact which is immediately recognized by all those who are subjected to this symbolic annihilation. (xv)

The early myths of the Australian nation whether they were drawn from the experiences of mateship in the Australian outback or the travails of Gallipoli had a tendency to not only elide the perspective of the Aborigines in the narration of the nation but also of the female gender. In more recent times those articulations of the national myth are increasingly being replaced by new myths of a more inclusive multicultural Australia. The biggest impulse for this has come from the sudden upsurge of writing by women and Aborigines. Even within the realm of Aboriginal writing women have taken the forefront with writers like Sally Morgan and Ruby Langford making a big impact on the increased public acceptance of Aboriginal narratives. The increase in autobiographical and biographical texts has also blurred the line between fact and fiction, between genres and disciplines such as history and literature. As a matter of fact, these voices have often made the personal narrative the vehicle of political protest and awareness raising. Immigrant writing too takes a look at the way multiculturalism actually works in Australia. The anomie faced by the immigrants of various backgrounds and the historical legacies and narratives they bring with them challenge versions of multiculturalism that are trying to assimilate differences under a simplistically homogenous 'Australian' umbrella.

5.4 OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE CANON

Increasingly there is no consensus on national canons as far as literature goes. This applies to Australia as well. The term 'Australian literature' has been used to refer to a body of genres and texts that has always been determined by social and political factors with different orientations to the dominant groups wielding political power at different times in Australia's history. Originally the desire to establish an Australian literary canon was deeply linked with a desire to create an alternate tradition for study and public consumption that saw itself as distinct from the British canon. The construction of the canon involved the designation of the great Australian writers and their works as at once worthy to be set along side canonical figures of the imperial canon and yet in opposition to them. This canon was to make clear the colonists' and settlers' rights to belong to the ranks of the imperial center as well as to the land they had invaded and colonised. The paradox was that at the same time they were trying to earn the seal of approval from the very colonial system whose values they were in supposed opposition to.

There are two ways the Australian canon is being contested. The first involves revealing what the canon does not include. This implies revising the canon to include new texts that remove the imbalance of a literary tradition that gave preference to white male writers depicting a particular image of Australia. The other involves taking another look at so-called canonical authors and texts and revealing how they inscribe challenges to the traditional conceptualization of what is Australian literature. This involves a process of rereading.

Patrick White, one of the best known and most taught of Australian writers, is interesting in the way he is both positioned inside and outside the canon. Today he is

considered very much a canonical figure for Australian literature. In a certain sense he is the equivalent of what Shakespeare is to British literature. Ken Goodwin in *A History of Australian Literature* feels strongly that the eleven novels of Patrick White constitute the most impressive oeuvre in Australian fiction, a judgment verified according to him by White being the only Australian writer awarded the Nobel Prize. The paradox is evident here: it is the external and international recognition that bolsters Patrick White's position in the canon. For much of the time that he did write the reception his work got in Australia was anything but flattering.

Patrick White came from settler stock, so in a sense he was bonafide 'Australian'. However his temperament and his higher education at Cambridge exposed him to the literature, the values and the ethos of the imperial center and Europe in a strong way. He evinced in many ways the taut tension between the cultural values of the Antipodean margins of Australia and the colonial center. He generated as a result quite a lot of hostility and drew critical flak for his vocal aversion to what he saw as Australian philistinism or lack of genuine culture. His most (in)famous words about seeing "in all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions ... and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves"(15) struck a raw nerve in the popular psyche.

From one point of view this kind of an opinion was predictable in that it was very much a part of the modernist critique of postwar society in Europe and America. White's use of symbols as a recurring technique in his writing also drew upon European traditions of twentieth century experimental writing in Europe. This however worked against the Australian celebration of the spirit of the average man, the success of settlement and survival in the face of odds. Throughout his career, while White's works were recognized and applauded on both sides of the Atlantic where they fell into predictable moulds, in Australia critics and the reading public did not evince such a positive outlook. What White was creating went against the grain of the national image and myth. It debunked what the Australian's prized and valorized most. The Nobel Prize winner who is today a celebrated canonical figure was at one time designated as 'Australia's Most Unreadable Novelist' and had the likes of A.D. Hope dismiss his work as "illiterate verbal sludge".

The thematic preoccupations and techniques employed by White were out of synch with the more canonically acceptable social realist writing that celebrated the spirit of survival in the Outback and the Bush, the camaraderie of mateship in the face of all odds. Thus when White explored the interior dilemmas of alienated characters seeking totality and internal wholeness, or when he set his narratives in urban milieus and abundantly used symbols and motifs he seemed to be breaking the unwritten laws of Australianness. This was seen in some quarters as evincing a lack of rapport with the life of the average Australian. A novel like *The Solid Mandala,* set in the suburbs of Sydney and focusing on the interior drama of existence in the face of decay and loss, could have been set, it has been argued, in any urban location in the western world – it was not conventionally or typically Australian.

Paradoxically, White consciously set out to work against the Australian literary tradition of naturalism and realism. He says he wanted "to people the Australian emptiness in the only way I am able to" (44). What the outside world and White himself saw as the greatest strengths of his writing were for a long time an affront to the Australian national image. As a result it undermined his popular and critical acceptance until the Nobel Prize made him a very desirable addition to the canon. Rereading even a supposedly canonical writer in this light reveals the many ways in which the horizons of national and literary expectations have been and continue to be redefined in Australian literature today.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

Australian literature, like the national literature of most countries has been a vehicle that has both endorsed and contested the national myth and desire to construct a distinct identity. It is useful to explore the possibilities this has opened in terms of interrogating the premises that went into constructing canons and the ones that are now being used to revise them.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss some aspects of the course Australian writing has taken.
2. Discuss aspects of the inclusion and exclusion of Aborigines, and other groups within the framework of the construction of the Australian national identity.
3. Analyse how Patrick White stands both inside and outside the Australian canon for literature.

5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 6 CANADIAN LITERATURE: SCANNING THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 Canada : Country and Character
  6.2.1 History
  6.2.2 Canada's Cultural and Literary Milieu
  6.2.3 Forging a Literary Identity
6.3 The Writing on the Wall
  6.3.1 Overcoming the Odds
  6.3.2 Prose
  6.3.3 Poetry
  6.3.4 Drama
6.4 Let Us Sum Up
6.5 Questions
6.6 Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to familiarize students with tendencies and trends that embody English-Canadian writing. With the emergence of a keen interest in literatures that emanate from beyond the boundaries of Britain and the United States, this unit will focus on the historical, social and literary impacts that have helped Canada evolve its own literary tradition and identity. It will also aim to present a survey of this literature from the early beginnings to its present invigoration and variety.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

With the end of World War II, the sun set on the British empire. Previously colonised national units scrambled to assert and obtain their independence. Reverberations of this emerging scenario of political de/reconstruction found their echoes in the literary arenas of nations across the world. The literary commonwealth of English speaking/writing peoples, with its legacy of an inherited idiom, usage and tone, set about evolving its own indigenous counterparts. This meant that each national-literary entity had to struggle to come to terms with literary traditions determined by the erstwhile centre. This underlines the clash between the forces that represented anxiety (or tradition) with those that stood for value which had to be reconsidered and reframed given the new ground realities. The need for an indigenous literary outpouring was keenly felt. New literatures reflected the contemporary historical, social, and political pressures as they endeavoured to speak in a tongue that equally addressed native and global readership. There also emerged a rapidly changing scenario that revolved round evaluative procedures in literatures. In a fast changing world literature was slowly incorporated into a bigger domain of reference called "cultural studies." These new literatures had to traverse forward with grim determination and carve out their own niche in the pantheon of literatures written in English.

Canada belongs to the literary commonwealth of English speaking/writing nations. It has also had to come to terms with its unique position in the North American

subcontinent. Canadian literary traditions have had their roots in England, France and the United States. It is a young nation as far as its written history goes. Populated by indigenous peoples since the earliest of times, Canada saw the advent of Europeans in the fifteenth century. Skirmishes between English and French settlements in North America continued intermittently till 1759 when Britain gained control of all of Canada. The ensuing American Revolution revealed Canada's anomalous position. It was characterised by a sense of loyalty to Britain, the mother country, on one side, and the desire to establish selfhood, like the United States, on the other. The nation's history, therefore, reflects strains of both continuity and breach, as the country has had to look across its eastern seaboard and its southern boundary. Its early literature in English, too, has shown similar trends, but only for a short while. By the early nineteenth century, however, Canadian writing has endeavoured to evolve its a voice which bore the hallmarks of assertion and strength. In the twentieth century, especially in the second half, creative resilience and variety can be perceived in its literary enterprise. Towards the close of the century, Canadian writing can be seen to have metamorphosed into stances characterised by growth, coherence, and selfhood, as the nation marches ahead in its quest for modernity.

The formation of the Canadian canon was initiated by early literary histories of the country. Most of these emerged from the extra-literary concept of the nation that involved the "Canadian-ness" of literature written in the country. The early literary historians have looked at literature and canon-formation along with the spiritual and political development of the nation. Later Canadian literary output has consciously broken out of these restrictive shackles by aspiring to address readership across the globe.

6.2 CANADA: COUNTRY AND CHARACTER

6.2.1 History

Literature can never written in a vacuum and writers respond to the pressures of society of which they are a part. They are affected by the kinds of people that make up their milieu and their nation. In their writings are rendered reflections of, and responses to, these realities.

National literary canons attempt to bring into existence a definition of a national literature that is tied to the concept of nationhood. Such canons provide the literary vision that shapes newly articulated work and expresses how a culture locates its writings within its larger history. It, thus, becomes essential to undertake a brief exposition of Canada's history. It is the second largest country in the world and enjoys a unique Janus-like position, (Roman god with two heads guarding two doors) in which it looks towards two aggressive and dominating neighbours--the United States of America to the south and Great Britain, across the Atlantic, in the east. It was only in 1867 that Canada emerged as a stable political entity whose present national boundaries were finalised as late as 1949.

Before the advent of white man, its native peoples, the Indians and the Inuits inhabited it. In 1497, when John Cabot of Italy sailed up the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the white men first made his appearance in this rugged, sparsely populated land. Initially the eastern seaboard saw the establishment of white settlements that existed either as trading posts or as military garrisons. Imperialist designs encouraged the French and the British to establish these settlements. Till the seventeenth century it was the French who dominated this imperial race but colonial ambitions brought about the inevitable clashes between the two. The French were defeated in 1759, ensuring that most of settled North America was British. This state of affairs continued for a brief period till the American War of Independence in 1775. It left Canada in a peculiar position as it comprised communities that chose to align themselves with the British rather than the United States. On one hand these.

communities sought to establish a life of modified British social and political traditions; on the other, they hesitated in severing connections with the mother country and adopting the extremes of complete breakaway and independence from it. It was this tendency that laid the social, political and psychological foundations for what eventually cohered as the Canadian nation.

The success of the American War of Independence led to a substantial influx of the Loyalists from the United States to Canada. The War of 1812 united not only the English-speaking Upper Canada and the French-speaking Lower Canada against the expansionist designs of the newly constituted United States; it also promoted a sense of distinctiveness and readjustment within. Napoleonic wars on the Continent resulted in massive European migration to Canada that witnessed new waves of settlers proceeding towards the sparsely populated western regions. Beneath the semblance of peace burned the fires of French-British rivalry. This led to frequent skirmishes between the French and English-speaking populations till 1837 and resulted, ultimately, in Lord Durham's Report of 1839 which paved way for responsible government. A series of conferences led to Confederation in 1867. This meant the creation of the Dominion of Canada that initially comprised the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec. Other provinces joined this Confederation over time; in 1949, New Foundland was the last to join. The national flag was adopted as late as 1975 as the Canada of today emerged with its ten provinces and a central federal government.

6.2.2 Canada's Cultural and Literary Milieu

The Canadian enterprise of nationhood reflects, and is reflected, in its literary history. Four permanent factors emerge as landmarks in its history. They are **a northern character, a historical dependence, a monarchical government,** and **a committed national destiny** that takes into account special relations with other states. The northern character is ancient in its origins as it harks back to northern European maritime aspirations. What distinguishes the discovery and occupation of Canada from the rest of the Americas is that it was the outcome of the year-round expeditions of Norse seamen-farmers probing the northern seas for new harbours and fisheries, new hay and timber sources. The nation's dependency takes into account the varying degrees of economic, political and strategic reliance that Canada has exhibited down the ages. The northern character itself is a dependent one as it seeks to locate its markets not only for staples and luxuries but also for the needs of the mind and the body. It is the quest for these locations that produced the ancient Norse and Icelandic sagas and gave rise to a new nation in which the political fabric united the technology of an advanced industrial base with the exploitation of the natural resources of its vast area. In the twentieth century, this dependence underwent a transformation in which it was transmuted into the spirit of free association and free alliance with the United States as well as Britain. The country has had to steer cautiously in its dealings with these two juggernauts in political, as well as, economic terms. Canadians have shown little of the republican sentiment and have chosen to remain a British constitutional monarchy. In doing so, they have consciously adopted a national destiny that operates on the twin principles of continuity and change.

One of Canada's starkest realities is the fact that it has two major cultures, the anglophone and the francophone, and many smaller ones. Dual culture, it must be pointed out, is one of history's many harsh gifts to Canada and it has given rise to friction and weakness. As a result, the two predominant cultures have often presented varied perspectives on common experiences. In the one respect that both cultures are united is the shared psychology of endurance and survival, and it is these qualities that engender and sustain modern Canadian writing. It is against the backdrop of these factors in Canadian history that the country's literary history can be better appreciated. The earliest Canadian writing had fulfilled a utilitarian purpose as it was done to help the country's pioneering forefathers keep records. This was followed by another phase that saw the importation of foreign models. This stage was succeeded

by yet another in which imitation and translation of foreign models becomes a norm. The end of this was phase marked by the production of a literature reflecting the Canadian locale and setting. The next phase was characterised by the intensification of this tendency and resulted in the production of independent works. Several literary generations later emerged the early classics of the country's national literature. They mark the penultimate stage of evolution and set the standards of independence and interest that mark a deviation and breaking away from restrictive national moorings. National literary traditions emerged subsequently, defining the parameters of nationalistic standards. In its final stage--that of maturity--the national literature was seen to shed its national concerns, and gain international recognition, thereby opening itself up elsewhere for translation and imitation.

To find a literature is to determine the solidity of the nation's existence in time. The European advent represents the stage of occupation that was marked by the raising of garrisons/fortifications. It is characterised by an attitude of a garrison mentality or a closed community whose values, customs, and manners have been transported intact from another environment and refuse to be influenced by the new surroundings. The situation is characterised by a lack of reconciliation or assimilation. This was succeeded by conflict where the experience of a community's imported reality clashes with the amorphous, but immediate, local reality. This attitude symbolises the frontier mentality that is marked by flight, discovery, and the struggle to endure. Once the community familiarises itself with the new territory, the colonial mentality emerges. It is marked by a fragmented transportation to a newly civilised location which still glorifies an idealised past. The fourth stage is reached with the establishment of a self-defining nation opening itself to the immigrant. He is the outsider seeking entry into an area of conflicting and alien orders and conditions. Canada's literary history reflects this pattern of evolution.

6.2.3 Forging a literary identity

The nationalist leanings of the country's literature have, since its earliest manifestations, remained steadfast in prioritising national self-definition and self-promotion. Nationalist values have occupied the centre-stage in the Canadian literary enterprise as it has sought to define and differentiate the "nation" through myriad literary voices. These literary voices embody the tugs and pulls of creative and critical writing of Canada that has, since its earliest days, been involved in an endeavour to make a strong case for distinctiveness.

English Canada showed an inclination towards maintaining links with the parent culture while French Canada favoured the notion of itself as a fragment pursuing its down separate destiny in North America. Recent canonical and literary debates acknowledge a sense of spiritual continuity with British or American models but insist that ethnic diversity is a reality and will hold sway in the times to come. In his "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada*, Northrop Frye had posed a significant historical question about Canadian identity when he asserted that it is not the literary voices answering the "Who am I?" question that truly spoke for and represented Canadian identity. It is, rather, those literary voices that chose to respond to the "What is here?" question that truly addressed themselves to the country's formulation of its literary canon. This assertion underlines the topographical bent of Canadian writing which focused on the physical environment of the land. Canadian national consciousness emphasizes a sense of difference that is steeped in the awareness of the uniqueness of place. Geography complemented history as literary creativity took off.

The seminal event of Confederation in 1867 is a defining moment in the history of Canada and it can be taken as the event that set into motion Canada's historical/cultural clock. In the early days, the favoured form of writing was poetry, and the poetic aesthetic governing it had been inherited from Britain. Poetry was perceived as a treasure that presented the close communion of the material and

spiritual worlds. This communion symbolised the juxtaposition and merger of the spiritual, political, cultural and historical realities, subsuming in itself the nation. Such writing was imbued with heroic and picturesque features, which, in turn were succeeded by the era of political and constitutional struggle that ended in the establishment of responsible government, and ultimately achieved fruition in the establishment of the Confederation. This phase is characterised by that peculiar bent of mind that reveled and participated in the endeavour of nation building. Reflections of this are to be found in Canadian literary history when pre-Confederation literature that does not reflect the collective struggle for national self-determination is relegated to the canonical margins, as informative but imitative or incidental. That writing which described transcontinental travel, exploration or regional detail with the specificity that suggested mastery is privileged as a kind of literary equivalent to physical and political control over the environment. The writers of the Confederation generation then come to occupy canonical centrality because of the coincidence of their literary maturity with that of the political will and character of the people.

Canada's existence as a nation in the face of the rejection of the American Revolution by the Canadian Loyalists and reverses suffered by America in the War of 1812 are two historical realities that gave to impetus the sense of national identity and pride within the Canadian psyche. Canadian writing initially emerged from a colonial derivative culture and then attempted to deviate and evolve into a mature national identity in which maturity is not just a national but a particular geographical, political, and cultural version of a universal ideal. Subsequent writing and canonical studies are an apt example of this propensity as the seeds of this emerge from the preoccupation with national identity. Canadian writers at the end of the nineteenth century were more inclined towards defining the contours of the vast expanses of land that comprised their country and they aspired for an emotional equation with it. The common trend noticeable through the literature of that era was an adherence to the Romantic/Victorian literary models of the mother country (England). This propensity indicated only too clearly the colonial shackles that still bound the land.

The turn of the century was marked by the arrival of waves of immigrants from other nations. Time and conditions conspired together, compelling and generating fresh perspectives in the creative arts. Twentieth century Canadian writing is characterised by this new outlook that seeks to reconsider and transform the earlier impulses and literary responses. A number of Canadian writers lamented the absence of a critical climate and underlined the stringent need for a more critical approach for evaluating its writing. The fundamental criticism against writing was that it ignored the intelligence by not addressing the individual and, as a result, it seemed enervated. By failing to arouse the intellect, such writing could never authenticate that basic component of modernism that is concerned with real experience. Its absence, thereby, precluded it from the domain of modernism. The outstanding reason for this was various forms of narrowness that manifested themselves in Canada as Puritanism, provincialism and colonialism.

In determining critical parameters, the A. J. M. Smith/ John Sutherland debate occupied the literary centrestage. Smith's cosmopolitan ideal attempted a synthesis of national distinctiveness with international merit and represented the fusion of the traditional criterion of universality with the modernist standard of internationalism. Sutherland viewed the literary landscape from a perspective of socialism that had strong Canadian undertones. He suggested that the unreal and ethereal quality of Canadian writing was due to the fact that the middle-class Marxist writer usually came from England into an environment doubly alien because it was passing through a period of special change.

The first two decades of the twentieth century had seen a revolutionary turn of events. These events had inspired writers into repudiating the old ideas and set them off on a new path of creative energy and experimentation. Geographically speaking, localised and concentrated literary activity shifted from the environs of Montreal to Toronto.

The 1930s and 1940s witnessed the polemics of militant writing that was doctrinaire, aggressive and in revolt against society to an extent never seen in Canadian literature. The 1950s saw the emergence of another trend that was antithetical to the aggressively realistic writing of early modernism. This new writing exhibited a combination of simplicity, power, sympathy and intelligence as the guiding spirits, especially in the field of criticism. By emphasising the need for a critical outlook in literary assessment, the writers/critics laid the foundation of the emergence of Canadian schools of criticism. At the close of 1950s, there emerged new perspectives that eclipsed earlier tendencies. They sought to highlight a brand of modernism that displayed a strain that was both urban and realist. They advocated the principles of artistic freedom and integrity, and sound standards of craftsmanship.

This new phase in Canadian writing was characterised by creative ebullience and self-confidence. By shedding the vestiges of Victoriana, the country's literary enterprise sought to formulate new parameters for itself, especially in the sphere of literary evaluation and judgement. This resulted in the acknowledgement of a writer's presence within the sphere of contemporary time and space. The ways of seeing a setting were given far more importance than the setting itself and this became a pervasive influence on the writer's perceptions of reality instead of reality itself.

The pre-1950s phase can be described as one of *gemeinschaft* or a discourse that was characterised by an older type of village commune which had been replaced by the modern *gesellschaft* or a discourse of a conglomeration of isolated individuals in a market system. Given the emergence of new critical and theoretical perspectives on Canadian literature, it becomes quite apparent that the canon of the 1950s onwards had been greatly inclined towards creating a space for itself.

As the centre of Canadian life moved from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changed correspondingly. It began as an expression of the moral values that were generally accepted and then, as society got more complicated and more in control of its environment, it became more of a revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society. One recurrent feature of Canadian life reflected in its literature is the paradoxical superimposition of vast empty spaces and the lack of privacy from prying, avaricious eyes. Due to this, a tone of deep terror linked to the soul of men pervaded writing and manifested itself as anxieties representative of repressive morality. Writing revolved round the inheritance of political and moral disillusionment and predicament. Such themes found great favour with the Canadian writers of the 1960s.

The literary milieu that now emerged placed a premium on critical analysis and debate. Criticism had earlier favoured perspectives that were author-centred, thematic, and concerned with social matters; now it tended to focus on structural and technical commentary. The 1970s were a period that was dominated by a poetics that took into account not only theory but also the idea of nationhood. The two subsequent decades witnessed more changes. Abandoning the garrison of an exclusive culture in favour of experimentation with an imaginative construct of a wilderness, it focussed on creating an identity that had to be realised through commitment, not to a cause or doctrine, but to a sacrificial view of life. This view of life stresses the desirability of a metaphorical dying into life that all great art affirms and celebrates.

Canadian writing was seen to incline towards metafiction or the process of creating order through myth and art. It was involved in investigating the relationship between art (and language) and reality, on the one hand, and between the discourses of art and the structures of social and cultural power, on the other.

The new postmodern theoretical framework of reference brings together separate disciplines like philosophy, linguistics, history, sociology, literary criticism and psychoanalysis. The reader, writer and text have to meet within the context of these. When Canadian postmodern writing takes up issues like ethnicity, feminism, and

immigration, it once again reiterates this point. This writing has transfigured the emphasis on regionalism in literature into a concern for the different, the local, and the particular. Canadian writers re-figure the realist regional into a postmodern different. This is done through challenges to authority in nationalist politics, gender politics and issues related to indigeneity. Canadian writing of the 1990s focussed on communicating diversity and dismembering universality. The most remarkable effort in this direction was made by criticism. Impetus has been provided to Canada's literary enterprise in various forms and through the encouragement given by various extra-literary sources. These include the state's cultural policy, the publishing industry, and the role played by journals and little magazines.

6.3 THE WRITING ON THE WALL

In the myriad manifestations of art--painting, music, architecture, poetry, or prose--can be discerned the essence of an environment or a country. Over the years, Canadian literary enterprise has striven hard to find its moorings and communicate the flavour of the quintessential soul of the land. In the country's literary discourse can be perceived the rapid changes that have overtaken the social, moral and economic fabric of the nation. Individual writers, by resorting to their preferred modes of expression, have contributed to the discourse by foregrounding experience shared with their peers but conveyed through a medium that is particularly personal and individualistic.

6.3.1 Overcoming the odds

Despite its protracted beginnings in the eighteenth century, Canadian literature has traversed a long way in reaching the dimensions of the colossal verbal explosion of the 1970s onwards. This literature has encountered a number of obstacles in its growth. The primary one has been the psychological barrier that has existed in the creative faculties of Canadian writers due to the colonial repercussions of its history. Canadian writing has had to overcome the oppressive psyche of being dominated by the American and British literary traditions. It has also had to juggle with the frontier mentality that earlier formed the basis of its political consolidation and entity. The hold of Puritanism has been another stumbling block in the emergence of a strong Canadian tradition of writing. The Puritan outlook diluted the importance of the arts because it conceived of the artist only as a font of moral ideas, thus endorsing literary standards with a high degree of moral and social orthodoxy. The intensity of this outlook dwindled with the advent of the twentieth century. Another hurdle in the path of Canadian writing, has been regionalism. Strong undercurrents of it can be seen in the anglophone/francophone divide, the vivid western flavour of the Prairie provinces, and the eulogistic tone of pre-Confederation writing of British Columbia. The literary enterprise has had to address and negotiate with these issues. The unsound economic situation of Canadian publishing added to difficulties. Canada has faced stiff competition from its American and British publishers. Canadian writers, who were able to secure a British/American publisher or a British university guarantee, were assured of recognition. This situation compelled many a Canadian writer to migrate. A conscious effort has been made to establish a strong publishing network. Yet, the singular outstanding feature of this literature has been a hankering for a mode of expression that embodies the Canadian consciousness and psyche. This cultural concern has remained dominant, though sometimes dormant, and is evidenced in the numerous shade of writing that have emerged over time. Canadian writing can be viewed as a transition from its early phase of regional awareness and reflection to a marked interest in imagery, myth, symbol, value and psychology. These interests waned and were displaced by new critical strategies that sought to decode available writing and were encouraged in by different modes of institutional support.

In the twentieth century, little magazines embody a peculiar literary phenomena associated with the growth of poetry. In Canada they were the core component of the country's literary world and infrastructure. Little magazines first emerged in Canada in the nineteenth century, but it was only after the World War I that they acquired a recognised literary stature. The emergence of these magazines marks a critical juncture in the history of printing and publication. They reflect the extension of literacy by reaching out to mass audiences. They also mark the stage at which paper and printing became available for private and limited publication. These magazines served as important outlets for writers of poetry and prose.

Through radio and later, television, the writer intruded into Canadian homes, carving a niche of acceptance wherever he/she found an appreciative audience. Readings of poetry and fiction became extremely popular as they purveyed literature in audio-visual form. University depts also started teaching Canadian Literature.

Many associations like the British Association for Canadian Studies were established. All these various forms of encouragement have made a significant contribution towards establishing the credentials of Canadian literature.

6.3.2 Prose

It is in prose that anglophone Canadian writing first manifests itself. Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* is acclaimed as the first Canadian novel and it typifies the phase of literary importation. Written in the epistolary tradition, the novel is born out of the author's experience of a Canadian garrison town of the 1760s where her husband was chaplain for five years. This literary importation was replaced by the emergence of works that sought to come to terms with the environment in imaginative as well as practical ways. This involved writing which displayed the stirrings of local colour by giving primacy to Canadian settings and Canadian responses to them. Reality was perceived not so much as a set of objects as a construction of the writer in the guise of an observer. The narrative is a miscellaneous collection of impressions, character sketches, anecdotes, short stories, and poems that oscillate between a variety of tones and moods artificially heightened by the author. This tendency symbolises the psychological tensions that prevail in the immigrant's mind and haunt literary consciousness even today.

John Richardson, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Catherine Parr Traill, and Susanna Moodie are some of the writers of the early phase. Imitation of British models remains the underlying mode in these works; they break free from any other shade of importation by being imbued with a spirit and environment that is markedly Canadian.

Travel literature *per se* surfaced as an important medium of expression in Canada in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It contained a pragmatic response to the scenery of the country in verbal form. It often arose out of exploratory ventures undertaken to determine the locale and volumes of natural resources in the new dominion. Some well-known writers of this genre were Paul Kane, William Francis Butler and G. M. Grant. Other modes adopted were the historical romance, the fantasy, the social satire, the animal stories and the comedy of manners.

In the twentieth century there was a clear break from the influence of importation. Writers consciously moulded a native tradition in which material specific to Canada would forge the imagination and channelise its writing. In representations that range from physical settings to conflicts, this spirit manifests itself. Stephen Leacock, Laura Salverson, Martha Ostenso Frederick Philip Grove and Hugh MacLennan deserve special mention in this regard.

By the 1960s Canadian literature came into its own. It not only broke free from the shackles of influence and importation, but it also confidently overcame its

preoccupation with cultural/national identity. It was marked by a spirit of self-confidence, energy and sophistication that underlined the change from its earlier trend of realism. The new trend grew out of realism in a direction that drew it towards symbolism under the subtle influence of writers like Lawrence, Kafka and Joyce. Authors like Robert Kroetsch and Rudy Wiebe broke new ground by adopting a postmodernist stance and expression. Jack Hodgins justified the emergence of Canada's own brand of magic realism. This technique has worked its way into the writings of Hodgins himself, apart from Kroetsch, Susan Swan and Michael Ondaatje. Their works throw up myriad possibilities of interpretation arising out of the merger of the fantastic and the serious. A number of accomplished women writers have emerged since the 1950s. Some of the outstanding ones are Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood. Laurence's fiction is born out of her African experience that is strongly grounded in the tribal culture that gives privacy to family, clan, ethnic group or class, within a national existence. The Manawaka series places all its five heroines as strangers in a foreign land, the spirit of which seeps into their psyche. Even when they all eventually leave, their emotional ties to it are never severed. Laurence's contribution in the sphere of Canadian fiction lies in articulating a sensibility in which the sense of place holds away and women's perspectives find expression.

The ethnic fabric of Canadian society underwent a significant change in the 1970s with the opening up of borders to Asian immigrants. By the 1980s, the impact of their arrival was clearly manifest in the literature of the times. Prominent among them are Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, Joy Kogawa and Austin Clarke. Critical inputs in response to their writings found a congenial soil in *The Toronto South Asian Review*. On both creative and critical fronts, the Canadian literary milieu encouraged immigrants to foreground and discuss issues that had to do with physical, psychological and social alienation and displacement, and their struggle for survival and establishment in unknown territory.

It was as late as the 1960s when the Canadian native peoples were granted citizenship rights and enfranchisement. Yet the native/non-native rift continues in the form of economic, social and cultural inequalities that are a legacy of the country's colonial past. In the 1970s, native authors actually got down to recording their own history and commentating on Canadian society. These efforts were often dismissed as "protest literature." The 1980s saw a proliferation of native literature. This came about due to a conscious effort by the state to inculcate university-trained native writers, to generate an enthusiastic response/readership by staging festivals to introduce native writers, and to hone writing skills by forming aboriginal writing groups and conducting workshops. Native writing has concerned itself primarily with social, political and economic history as it navigates between issues of right and wrong, truth and fiction, men and nature. Well-known authors in this field are George Kenny, Tomson Highway and Evan Adam, Beatrice Colleton, Jeanette Armstrong, Joan Crate, Bruce Chester, Beth Cutland, Wayne Keon, and Daniel David Moses.

Children's literature has for its ancestors the didactic Christian doctrine and catechism purveyed by the Puritan establishment in the seventeenth century. It took almost two hundred years for it to evolve and mature into a creative medium that did more than just eulogise the pioneer struggle for survival in a bleak land. The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new trend in children's writing. This had to do with the portrayal of youth in a manner that was sentimental and cloying. Narratives revolved round protagonists whose insidious charm solved not only their personal difficulties but also resolved those of the adults around them. The first half of the twentieth century saw a resurgence of native tales retold through a romantic European perspective. Children's literature of the 1950s focused on fantasy and humour. The 1960s saw a radical change in the established patterns of this writing. The upheaval and change in contemporary society resulted in the emergence of themes that lay at the intersection of the adulthood and childhood. These included divorce, drugs, child abuse and other related problems, giving rise to a new realism

that had urban settings. Some well-known writers in this area are Marsha Hewitt, Clair Mackay, Paul Yee, Cora Taylor and Bernice Thurman Hunter.

6.3.3 Poetry

The Loyalists who came to settle in the Maritime provinces after the American Revolution wrote the earliest Canadian poetry. These were people whose political loyalties had been jolted by the success of the Revolution that saw the snipping of the final thread between Britain, the imperial power, and America, her colonial outpost. As disappointed Tories, they moved to Canada and their verse reflects this outlook. Oliver Goldsmith, the grandnephew of his English namesake, was the first poet who also attempted to describe the challenge that settlers faced in the new land. He wrote his long poem, *The Rising Village*, as a sequel to his relative's earlier work entitled *The Deserted Village*. Joseph Howe's *Acadia* reflects the same tradition of descriptive and reflective narrative; Adam Kidd's *The Huron Chief and Other Poems* also belongs to the school of romantic sentimentalism practised by Byron earlier.

The latter half of the century saw the rise of a new perspective in poetry. This was a reflective embodiment of the socio-political scenario in which the country endeavoured to subdue the wilderness, the native peoples, and the rebellions. The War of 1812 and the threat of American annexation hastened the birth of the spirit of national unity. Its literary manifestations took shape in the form of a national ideal that found expression in poetry. In the verse of Charles Sangster, Alexander MacLachlan, and Charles Mair can be identified the reflections of this ideal. Mair's *Tecumseh* is a verse drama that draws upon history in the inappropriate medium of a Shakespearean tragedy.

The golden age of Canadian poetry which dawned with the arrival of the Confederation Poets. They were assigned this nomenclature as they were unwittingly associated with each other through friendship, correspondence and perusal of each other's works. Though named after the country's Confederation in 1867, these poets were mere children at the time. Their significance lies in voicing the representational concerns of their generation despite being influenced by British/American writing. Their achievement can be gauged through the evolution of styles and attitudes that characterised the spirit of the new dominion at home and abroad. Charles G. D. Roberts, his cousin, Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott comprise the Confederation group of poets. The writing of each of the Confederation poets was highly individualised.

The modern movement in Canadian poetry began in the 1920's. It was marked by the simplification of diction and the divergence of themes. The romanticism of the past was replaced by the metaphysical complexity of realism that had fragmented human psyche the world over. E. J. Pratt, Earle Birney were the outstanding poets of this tradition. The 1920s and 30s also witnessed a poetic tradition that combined the cosmopolitan, the symbolist and the metaphysical strains. The chief exponents of this tradition were F. R. Scott, A. J. M Smith and A.M. Klein, all of whom were together termed the Montreal Group. The 1940s and 50s saw the emergence of a younger generation of poets. Prominent among whom were Patrick Anderson, Patricia K. Page, Douglas Le Pan, John Glassco, Miriam Waddington, Anne Wilkinson, James Reany, Jay Macpherson and Daryl Hine. This generation honed poetry that individualised versions of metaphysical/romantic poetry which, in its basic expression and sensibility has the undeniable feel of Canada. Their poetry was succeeded by that of Robert Kroetsch and Margaret Atwood. The prose lyric emerged as the dominant tradition in the writings of Al Purdy, Patrick Lane, Milton Acorn, John Newlove, Elizabeth Brewster and Pier Giorgio Di Cicco. In their individual voices they examine and ruminate upon issues of daily life.

6.3.4 Drama

Canadian drama has lagged behind all the other literary genres in its evolution. The reasons for this are many. One of them has been the sparse demographic reality of the country's far-flung communities that did not actively encourage theatre. Another reason was the financial liability of traversing these immense distances as theatre groups sought audiences. The growth of the audio-visual medium also hampered the growth of drama. Added to all these was the deeply entrenched Puritan psyche that viewed dramas as morally undesirable and consciously discouraged its growth.

The earliest manifestations of drama in Canada were the amateur performances of the late nineteenth century. They were primarily undertaken to provide for the entertainment of garrison towns and no written records of these plays survive. At the turn of the century the fortunes of drama looked up. The reasons for this included the decline in the number of foreign touring companies, in the overwhelming popularity of films, in the establishment of drama festivals, and in the important work done by theatre critics and essayists like Fred Jacob, Vincent Massey, Merill Denison, B. K. Sandwell and Hector Charlesworth. The most popular form of drama at this juncture was the one-act play.

At the close of the 1960s, the impact of feminism was seen in the writings of some Canadian women dramatists like Beverly Simons, Carol Bolt and Sharon Pollock. In more recent times the plays of Erica Ritter and Margaret Hollingsworth have aggressively foregrounded feminist concerns. Outstanding male playwrights of the closing decades of the twentieth century are George Ryga, D. Freeman, T. Walmsley, D. Fennario, and James Reaney.

Canadian drama of the 1980s concentrated on the elements of the comic and the Gothic. The works of Linda Griffiths, Patrick Beamer, John Murrell and David French were outstanding examples of the former trend. Gothic drama focused on the element of psychological horror and its chief exponents were Peter Colley, Tom Grainger, Carol Bolt and Jim Garrard. Regional influences were obviously apparent.

6.4 LET US SUM UP

A nation/culture has to evolve on its way to establishing its credentials of reckoning. Canada's literary enterprise has passed through many stages. It began with the stage of occupation that was marked by raising of garrisons/fortifications and a mentality of a closed community whose values, customs, and manners were transported intact from another environment and refused to be influenced by the new surroundings. This situation was characterised by a lack of reconciliation or assimilation. The second stage was one of conflict where the experience of a community's imported reality clashed with the amorphous, but immediate, local reality. This symbolised the frontier mentality which was marked by flight, discovery, and struggle to endure. Once the community familiarised itself with the new territory, the colonial mentality emerged. It was marked by a fragmented transportation to a newly civilised location which still glorified an idealised past. The fourth stage was reached with the establishment of a self-defining nation opening itself to the immigrant. He is the outsider seeking entry into an area of conflicting and alien orders and conditions.

This literature has come of age despite treading an off-beaten track. Its evolving strength has been its ability to coexist with American cultural dominance and also by producing works that have acquired repute for quality beyond national boundaries. Michael Ondaatje's *Prix Medici* award for *Anil's Ghost* (2000) and Margaret Atwood's Booker for *The Blind Assassin* (2000) are testimony to this. In carving out its place in the annals of world literature, Canadian writing has transcended the

native/cosmopolitan divide by proving that literature has little or nothing to do with a writer's home address.

6.5 QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does Canada's history and geography complement its literature?

2. Discuss the stages that mark Canada's literary enterprise.

3. Comment on the various forms of conscious encouragement given to Canada's literary endeavour by the state and its institutions.

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MAEN-119
New Literatures In English

Block

2

A GRAIN OF WHEAT

Block Introduction	
UNIT 1 **Africa-The Dark Continent and Kenya—The Land of Gikuyu and Mumbi**	5
UNIT 2 **Literature and Politics**	15
UNIT 3 **Modern Novel in Africa**	22
UNIT 4 **Ngugi wa Thiong'o - Life, Literature and Ideology**	33
UNIT 5 ***A Grain of Wheat* - Summary**	39
UNIT 6 ***A Grain of Wheat* – An Evaluation**	57

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MAEN-119/82

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this Block is to help the students read and understand the significance of *A Grain of Wheat*, a novel written by a well-known novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who hails from Kenya in East Africa and whose writings—equally well-known within Kenya and Africa as well as outside the continent—range from stories and novels to plays and non-fiction. We shall place *A Grain of Wheat* in the context of not only other writings by Ngugi wa Thiong'o but also in the larger context of African history, the colonization of Kenya in particular and the tradition of the modern novel on the continent. A section on the relationship between literature and politics is provided as a theoretical input. This, we hope, shall help the students understand better, the significance of Ngugi's novel, since most post-colonial writing in Africa and the writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in particular are steeped in a deep and complex sense of history. Again, we shall also look at the biographical details of Ngugi's life and his world-view, since most writings by Ngugi have drawn their sustenance from various events in his life as also his ideological standpoint. This becomes praticularly important in the case of Ngugi, who is a radical and committed writer. In fact, his last novel *Matigari* (1989) written in Gikuyu and translated into English is a political novel which captures his concerns—colonisation, the class struggle and the gender divide in society.

In the first four units we provide a brief introduction to African history, as well as a history of Kenya, a discussion on literature and politics and the tradition of the modern novel on the continent, as well as a brief biographical sketch of the author in that order—all of which would set the tone for a detailed chapter-by-chapter analysis of the text which we provide in unit five. An evaluation of *A Grain of Wheat* would follow the detailed analysis of the text in unit six.

UNIT 1 AFRICA—THE DARK CONTINENT AND KENYA—THE LAND OF GIKUYU AND MUMBI

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Africa—the Dark Continent
  1.1.2 Africa—the Myth of Primitivism, Political reasons thereof
  1.1.3 Africa and the Evolution of Man
  1.1.4 Africa and the Ancient Egyptian Civilization
  1.1.5 Africa under Europe
1.2 Pre-Historic Kenya—Location, Antiquity
  1.2.1 Social and Political Structures in Pre-Historic Kenya
  1.2.2 Modern Kenya—the First Colonization by Arabs
1.3 The British
  1.3.1 The East Africa Trading Company
  1.3.2 The East Africa Protectorate
1.4 The Settlers –the Land Grab
  1.4.1 Forced Labour
  1.4.2 Native Reserves
1.5 First protests—K.C.A., Y.K.A., Harry Thuku
  1.5.1 Female Circumcision—Independent Church and Schools Movements
  1.5.2 Africans and Indians—Joint Struggles
1.6 The Emergence of Jomo Kenyatta
  1.6.1 African Trade Union Congress—the First Demand for Total Independence
1.7 Banning of Mau Mau—the Emergency
  1.7.1 Lifting of the Emergency, Constitutional Conference in London
  1.7.2 Uhuru—Kenyatta as First Prime Minister
1.8 Let Us Sum Up
1.9 Questions
1.10 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Unit are manifold. The first is to trace briefly, the history of the African continent since the pre-historic times, and also to discuss the various meanings implied in the epithet –the dark continent – as applied to Africa by the European colonial powers.

A brief account of the colonization of the continent from the time of the arrival of the first Europeans—the Portuguese-- is also given. This has been done with the aim, primarily, of providing the political-cultural background to our study of *A Grain of Wheat*. In the second part of the Unit you will be given a detailed history of Kenya since the pre-historic times to the situation at the point of its Uhuru in December 1963. In between, are the details of its first colonization by the Arabs and the Portuguese. The model of colonization followed by the British is described next. Some of you may be reading African literature for the first time. It is for this reason that a detailed background history is necessary. The struggles waged by the Africans—including the Mau Mau struggle—are also discussed in this Unit. All these have a significant bearing on our understanding of the text – *A Grain of Wheat*—which is based on the theme of the freedom struggle of Kenya.

1.1 AFRICA—THE DARK CONTINENT

In most books of history written by Europeans, the continent of Africa is referred to as 'the dark continent'. This expression—the dark continent—was most probably first used by travellers and missionaries who happened to visit the African continent much before political claims on its territory were made and it was colonized by various European powers. The term 'dark' has been used for describing the continent of Africa because, firstly, these early travellers as well as missionaries considered as 'dark' anything mysterious that they did not understand much about. Secondly, and more importantly, these first visitors considered Africa to be inhabited by people who were primitive, uncivilized and savages. The colour of ignorance, as we know, is black. Acccording to these early missionaries, the Africans believed in magic and other so-called irrational rituals and customs. Once again, magic is associated with black colour as, for example, the term 'black magic'implies. Finally, there was the most obvious reason for calling Africa the dark continent: its inhabitants had very dark skins. These opinions, particularly about the Africans being primitive and uncivilized were accepted blindly by most Europeans who entered the continent either for trade or for colonization. In fact, the colonial administrations built upon this myth of primitivism of the Africans by stating that Africa had no history, no culture, no past.

1.1.1 Africa—the Myth of Primitivism, Political reasons thereof

There was a sound reason—from the European point of view—behind accepting such an image of the Africans. The European powers used the excuse of 'civilizing' these savages for entering Africa and for staying on for the economic and political exploitation of its people. Thus was created the myth of the white man's burden which expression meant—on the face of it—that the white man had taken upon himself the onerous task—the burden—of "civilizing" the savage Africans.

However, as later researches into the history, politics, social organization and cultural achievements of the continent have shown, Africa was neither primitive nor uncivilized before the Europeans occupied it. Civilization, as we know, is much more than technological progress and cannot be equated with the possession of fly-by-wire aircrafts, flat-screen television sets, personal computers, cell phones, airconditioned cars and microwave ovens. If this were so, people belonging to the most ancient civilizations like the Indian, the Chinese, the Egyptian and the South American would all be primitive and savage. Like these, ancient Africa also boasted of various centres of civilization and culture with well-organized social and political systems and significant achievements in their respective fields of fine arts like music and dance.

1.1.2 Africa and the Evolution of Man

By now enough archeological and anthropological evidence is available to show that during the evolutionary process our ancestor—Australapithecus Africans or man-ape, as he was called—first emerged on the African continent. Rift valley region in East Africa was the most probable place where it happened. Excavations at the Oldwvai Gorge in what is now called Tanzania have produced ample evidence of it being one of the oldest sites of world cultures. Discovery of primitive tools for hunting like the hand axe in not only East Africa but also in the Congo Basin and Zimbabwe shows a parallel development of this culture. This also compares well with the developments in other similar centres in India, China and parts of Europe.

1.1.3 Africa and the Ancient Egyptian Civilization

However, the most fascinating evidence about the cultural developments in Africa has been provided by a Senegalese scholar—Cheikh Anta Diop—who claims that the ancient Egyptian civilization was set up and nurtured by black Africans more than ten

thousand years ago. Relying upon evidence from various sources including historical accounts, Cheikh Anta Diop convinces us that when the great Sahara started drying up about 7000 B.C., before which it was a huge lake, a section of Africans began to trek along the routes of the river Nile. They finally settled in the valley at the mouth of the Nile delta where the river emptied its waters into the Mediterranean. Here they set up the great ancient Egyptian civilization with unprecedented progress in speculative scientific research. This cycle of the civilizational progress lasted many thousands of years during the course of which these black Africans colonized neighbouring territories inhabited by whites. The Semitic world of today is perhaps a result of a free cross-breeding between the two races.

However, like many other ancient civilizations, this civilization set up by black Africans in the valley of the Nile also ran out of steam. In the course of time it was overrun by the Persians. Then came the Macedonians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Turks in that order. More recently, the French and the British occupied the territory. This prolonged colonization resulted in the snapping of the links between the delta and the original centres of the civilization back in Africa. These centres lost touch with not only the Egyptian art but with one another as well, surviving for some time as isolated pockets during which period they concentrated more on the social, political and moral organization of their societies rather than on material development. In the meantime, Europe benefitted from the ancient Egyptian civilization via the Greeks and the Romans. Thus while Africa lagged behind in techonological progress, Europe marched ahead full steam. The great empires of Ghana, Mali and Ife in West Africa, Ethiopia in the East, Zimambe in the South and Congo in South West are a testimony to the great civilization that the Africans built thousands of years ago.

Whether the hypothesis of Cheikh Anta Diop is wholly true or partially false is really not so important for us for the time being. What matters is the fact that it establishes, beyond any doubt, that ancient Africa at that time was as much primitive or developed, as much barbaric or civilized as any other part of the world, including Europe. It, therefore, proves as false the opinion of the European powers that when they arrived in Africa they found its people to be primitive.

1.1.4 Africa under Europe

Africa's recent contact with Europe took place at the end of the fifteenth century when the Portuguese set up some rest and recuperation stations as also military garrisons on both the west coast of Atlantic and the east coast of the Indian Ocean en route to the East where they were headed, led by the legendry Vasco da Gama, for exploring the fabled riches of the Orient. Later, as the naval supremacy of France and Great Britain increased after the defeat of the Spanish Armada at the end of the sixteenth century, they too entered Africa to explore its interior for economic exploitation. By the end of the nineteenth century many more European powers had entered Africa. In fact there were military clashes among them for proclaiming supremacy over various parts of Africa. It is this that led to the holding of an European conference in Berlin in 1885 to portion out Africa among them With this the process of colonization of Africa was initiated with common European consent and was soon completed .

1.2 PRE-HISTORIC KENYA—LOCATION, ANTIQUITY

The Republic of Kenya—abode of legendry Gikuyu and Mumbi—is an ancient land, lying on the east-central coast of Africa, across the Equator and encompassing some of the most arid as well as most fertile parts of Africa within its geographical bounds of 5,82,644 square kilometers. Bordered in the north by Sudan and Ethiopia, in the east by Somalia and the Indian Ocean, in the south by Tanzania and in the west by

Uganda, Kenya is a former British colony which at one time was known as the East Africa Protectorate.

Anthropologists would have us believe that man first appeared on earth in these parts of Africa, as also in many other parts of the continent, about a million years ago. Once again, like in other parts of the world, the people in this region too passed through various stages of development.

These inhabitants of Kenya seem to have come in contact with traders from some of the civilized countries of that time, such as Egypt, Greece, Persia and India. In all probability, it is these traders who first introduced agriculture and domestication of animals to the people of this period.

1.2.1 Social and Political Structure in Pre-historic Kenya

There were no classes in Kenyan society at that time. There were only different ethnic groups with varied styles of political and economic organizations. Because of a lack of means of communication, they lived in isolation from each other. The mode of production was subsistence-oriented and was based on a communal system of labour utilization which was either voluntary or obligatory or both. Each tribe was a distinctive unit, generally managed by the tribe-elders, as was the case with the Gikuyu, for instance.

Land tenure was a complex affair. While land was not saleable, each adult had rights to its use that was controlled by the tribal authority. A member had temporary use on a piece of land, which ceased when he moved to another assigned area under the shifting cultivation system.

1.2.2 Modern Kenya—the First Colonization by Arabs and First Contact with Europe—the Portuguese

The first colonization of these people and of the coastal region began with the arrival of Arab Muslims in the eighth century, who came to propagate Islam but stayed on to trade in ivory, gold, timber, iron and black slaves.

In course of time, a number of independent city states—mostly ruled by Arabs—came up all along the coast from Mogadishu to Kilwa. Most of the Arab influence was, however, confined to the coastal areas only and there is no evidence of a similar contact with the natives of the interior.

By the middle of the 15th century, the Portuguese who had by then become a major colonial power and who were looking for controlling the sources of exotic products of the Orient for trade purposes, made their first penetration of the coast, in their search for gold and spices and began to expand their slave trade. In doing so, they drove the Arab rulers from the coastal areas of Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania, which they continued to occupy and exploit for the next 200 years.

1.3 THE BRITISH

The beginning of the 19th century, however, saw more European powers, particularly the British, the Germans and the French becoming more interested in Africa in general and the East Coast in particular. A number of explorers and missionaries travelled into the interior and made contact with the Africans.

Towards the end of the 19th century, European interests in the continent had reached competitive proportions. In a conference held in Berlin, in 1884-85, in which Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austro-Hungarian Empire, etc.

participated, it was decided to 'partition Africa'. Germany and Britain, however, continued to clash over supremacy in East Africa. Eventually it was agreed that Lake Victoria would form the boundary between their respective areas of influence. The territories lying north of the lake—Kenya and Uganda—came under the British control, while the territories lying south of the lake—Tangyanika—became the German domain. The British government, however, chose not to administer these areas directly.

1.3.1 East Africa Trading Company

A trading company—The Imperial British East Africa Company—was founded in 1888 through the granting of a Royal Charter to Sir William Mackinnon, a shipping magnate. Besides Kenya and Uganda, a ten-mile strip of the East Coast was obtained from the Sultan of Zanzibar on lease. The Company, it was claimed, had been 'formed for the purposes of pushing forward the civilization of Africa.' The modus operendi of this colonization in the name of civilization was once again the same as in Asia: eventual political control in the guise of trade.

However, the Company soon found out that the trade, particularly in ivory, was extremely expensive on account of high costs of transportation. It was then decided to construct a railway right from Mombassa upto Lake Victoria. During its construction which was being done with the help of labour force brought from India, the Company had to bear huge financial burdens. The Company gradually wound itself. Its Charter was annulled in 1885.

1.3.2 East Africa Protectorate

The East Africa Protectorate was proclaimed in 1895, with Lord Harding as its first Commissioner. By 1896, the British control over the area had stabilized, and the work on the railway was progressing smoothly.

Big game hunters and explorers passing through the region had been struck particularly by vast tracts of fertile land in the Rift Valley region. Among such travellers was one Captain Lugard who dreamt of large-scale agricultural farming and stock raising.

The principal inhabitants of the region, which later came to be known as 'white highlands' were the Gikuyu who were primarily agriculturists.

1.4 THE SETTLERS—THE LAND GRAB

With the completion of the railway in 1901, the idea of European settlement in the area was taken up in earnest so that the traffic derived from settlement would make the railway a profitable undertaking. This together with the transfer of the Eastern Province of Uganda, where most of the highlands were situated, to the East Africa Protectorate in 1902, further strengthened the possibility of non- African settlement. Harry Johnston, who was then the Special Commissioner for Uganda initially proposed to develop the area as 'a white man's country'.

Reports of the fertility of the land sent out of the administration to South Africa attracted a number of Europeans and as per the available records, the first batch of settlers mainly from Great Britain and South Africa arrived in 1902. These settlers occupied large chunks of fertile land for both farming and trading. Through a number of ordinances, the government reserved the Highlands exclusively for the white Europeans, excluding the native Africans and Indians.

The principal sufferers were of course the Gikuyu, since it was they who primarily inhabited the area and who were dislocated more than once after their land had been 'alienated' and given away to the European settlers—for a song. As the land-lust of the settlers increases, other tribes were deprived of their land as well. The Masai, the Nandis and the Kiss is too suffered through removal to far-flung areas labelled as 'native reserves'. A series of land legislations—Land Regulations of the East Africa(1897), Indian Land Acquisition Act(1896), East Africa Land Acquisition Order (1901), and the Crown Lands Ordinance(1902)—provided the government with control of all land in Kenya and parts of Uganda for selling, granting lease or otherwise disposing of.

1.4.1 Forced Labour

Land grab was not the only problem brought about by the colonial policy of European settlement. The settlers wanted a constant supply of cheap or free labour to work on these farms and with the African reluctance to work for outsiders i.e., European farmers, they found it increasingly difficult to obtain cheap labour. The African's reluctance was due to the fact that their basic needs were provided by the subsistence economy and moreover, they did not want to work for the colonialists. In those cases where African settlements were part of European acquired lands, the Africans were declared squatters with permission to cultivate a small plot of land on the farm premises—Shamba—and to keep members of the family as well as a few cattle. Appalling working conditions, and severe restrictions on both the physical movements of the squatters and also on the number of cattle they could keep and the kind of crops they could cultivate were definitely oppressive. Moreover, the wages were abysmally low. They were subjected to most cruel punishments on the flimsiest of excuses. In fact, their plight in many ways was worse than that of their brethern who had been sold as slaves in the Americas by the Arabs and the Europeans. The result was that as in other countries of Tropical Africa, labour force in Kenya was created by 'methods of extra economic coercion.'

In fact, the settlers, with the help of successive government legislations seized more than 7.6 million acres of most fertile land. Yet even close to the end of the colonial period only 18% of this land was cultivated while millions of Africans strived to eke out a living in highly congested reserves.

1.4.2 Native Reserves

These steps together with prohibitive rates of poll and hut taxes led to massive migration of peasants in search of a living. This led to further problems in the native reserves, from which most able-bodied males were absent, earning money as wage-labourers, for paying personal taxes. Not only did it cause physical hardships for peasants who walked large distances, sometimes hundreds of miles, for many weeks and sometime months to gain employment, but it also stripped the African villages of its most efficient labour force, leaving mainly old men, women and children.

1.5 FIRST PROTESTS—K.C.A., Y.K.A., HARRY THUKU

By now, the Africans were sufficiently alarmed about the settlers' conspiracy to annex their land permanently and they formed two Associations to defend their interests. The first—The Kikuyu Association(K.A.)—was formed in 1920, with the primary aim of defending Gikuyu land. It comprised mainly of Gikuyu Chiefs and headmen. A year later, a more broadbased and more militant Association—the Young Kikuyu Association(Y.K.A.)—was formed with Harry Thuku as its secretary. Thuku, a government telephone operator, launched his agitaion against not only the policy of annexing Gikuyu land, the 'Northey circulars' on forced labour, but also against the policy of carrying of 'kipande'—a card bearing the finger-prints of the bearer—by all

African male adults and the doubling of the Hut and Poll taxes from Rs. 5 to 10. Thuke received generous help from M.A. Desai, an Indian leader and journalist, in running his Association. Although, he started by enrolling only the Gikuyu, he soon extended its membership to other tribes as well. His arrest and subsequent deportation by the government led to a large demonstration in Nairobi in which over 20 Africans were killed by police firing. This act of the government triggered off the militant struggle by the Africans which led to the full-scale national liberation movement and eventual independence of Kenya in 1963.

Thuku's Y.K.A. which had been banned after his arrest and subsequent demonstrations, reappeared in 1925, under the new name Kikuyu Central Association (K.C.A.). Its appearance had coincided with the transfer of authority among the Gikuyu from one age-group to another, an event which occurred once in about twenty years. The K.C.A., immediately demanded, among others, the Africans' right to grow coffee, the appointment of a Gikuyu Paramount Chief, the publicaion of laws in Gikuyu language and the release of Harry Thuku. It also demanded direct representation by twelve Africans on the Legislative Council since the Europeans had neither 'true sympathy' nor 'thorough contact' with the people. They also expressed their fears about the security of title of their land after the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915.

1.5.1 Female Circumcision

In the meantime, yet another confrontation broke out, this time between the missionaries and the Africans. In 1929, the Church of Scotland condemned the tribal practice of female circumcision—a form of clitoridectomy—as 'savage' and 'barbarous'. Female circumcision was a custom that was regarded by the Gikuyu as also by many other tribes, as an essential element of their social structure. The issue was immediately taken up by the K.C.A., and it held large meetings in the Gikuyu reserves, highlighting the condemnation as yet another attack on their way of life by the Europeans, since the missionaries threatened to debar from church those persons practising femal circumcision and polygamy and also disallow the children of such parents from obtaining education in missionary schools. Most schools, as we know, were at that time run by Christian missions. It, therefore, called the bluff of the missionaries doing 'the wonderful job, at least in educating Africans.' The Africans went to the extent of setting up of their own African Church and Independent African Schools, both of which institutions were to play a very crucial role in the Kenyan struggle for national independence. The controversy also provided an excellent opportunity to Jomo Kenyatta, the general secretary of the K.C.A., to increase the sphere of the influence of his organization as well as to project himself as a leader. He addressed big political meetings that helped the organization in enrolling new members and collecting money for the struggle.

1.5.2 Joint Struggle by Africans and Indians

The joint fight by the Indians and the Africans was brought about through contacts among the trade union leaders. The government tended to overlook the strength of the African Associations. The governments decision in 1938, to destroy thousands of cattle heads belonging to the Wakamba provoked a mass protest by them and brought them in touch with the Gikuyu.

At the same time, the simmering discontent over appalling working conditions among the labour broke into a full scale strike. Makhan Singh, an Indian Printing Press worker, who had organized the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, and the K.C.A., played a steller role in organizing this strike that led to the appointment of a Commission to enquire into the working conditions of the labour force in Kenya. The report revealed government neglect and a scandalous state of affairs. With the outbreak of the war, K.C.A., and other such organizations of the Kamba and Teita

tribes were banned and their leaders arrested. The Indians and Europeans too suspended their political activities.

1.6 K.A.U., THE EMERGENCE OF KENYATTA

The Kikuyu African Union (K.A.U.) feeling frustrated, began to talk of a revolutionary struggle to free themselves from the colonial yoke. It was at this stage that Kenyatta returned to Kenya after his long stay in England and other countries of Europe and was accorded a hero's welcome.

Kenyatta found that the country was a fertile field for political activities because of the post-war discontent. The war-returnees had become aware of the national liberation movements in Asia. As unemployment grew both in the cities and in the countryside, the cry of 'Africa for Africans' grew stronger. Overcrowding in the reserves and extensive soil erosion had made the Africans talk of getting back their 'stolen lands' from the Europeans. Kenyatta began to travel around the country and addressed large meetings. In June 1947, he was elected the President of the Kikuyu African Union (K.A.U.) and began to attack the government policies.

1.6.1 African Trade Union Congress, the First Demand for Total Independence

African Trade Union Congress under the leadership of Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh also supported the struggle launched by Kenyatta in a big way. In fact, it was the ATUC, on May 1, 1950, that demanded for the first time in Kenya, total independence. Both Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh were arrested for being office bearers of an 'illegal' labour organization. Although the ensuing strike failed finally, it further strengthened the increasing cooperation between the Africans and the Asians in Kenya.

As frustration increased and as Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh were deported, the custom of oathing began in a big way across the whole country and a militant movement –Mau Mau—began to take shape which believed in inflicting damage on government machinary , among others, through violent means.

1.7 BANNING OF MAU MAU—THE EMERGENCY

In 1950, the government banned the so-called Mau Mau movement. Although Kenyatta and other so-called moderates denounced the movement, it continued to gain strength through the active cooperation of the people at large. As subsequent events were to prove, proscribing it proved to be counterproductive for the British government that got bogged down by it more and more with each passing day. The Europeans started putting pressure on the government to arrest the Gikuyu leaders and declare a state of Emergency in order to check the so-called Mau Mau activities, that, they alleged, were both anti-Christian and anti-European. Attacks on European farms and the murder of a senior Chief—Waruhiu—near Nairobi made the new Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring to declare a state of Emergency on October 20, 1952 and immediately thereafter Kenyatta and eleven top leaders besides others were arrested. British troops were flown in from Egypt and the reins of decision-making passed from the local administration to the government in London.

The outlawing of Mau Mau, the arrest of Kenyatta and other African leaders and the repression let loose on Africans in general by the British troops and district officials soon proved to be counter-productive. Over 10,000 Africans were killed by the

security forces and another 90,000 were detained in detention camps. Violence increased, leading to more repression that in turn generated more violence in reaction. The colonial government was, therefore, caught in a vicious circle of violence. Sentencing of Kenyatta and seven others at Kipenguria trial in a most unjust manner added more fuel to this fire. The settlers, taking advantage of this situation, demanded once again a share in conducting the Emergency operations. In June 1953, the K.A.U., was also banned, creating a kind of political 'vacuum' that once again was filled by the trade union movement under the leadership of Tom Mboya, a young Luo. The armed struggle, however, not only continued to be waged but became more broad-based.

1.7.1 Lifting of the Emergency and the Consitution Conference in London

Finally, the Emergency was lifted in 1957 and the process of devolving more powers to the Africans began. A Constitutional Conference was called in London in 1960, wherein it was decided to give the Africans majority seats—33 out of 65—in the Legislative Council. Africans would also have the largest number of ministers, viz., four against three Europeans and one Asian. The plan naturally irked the Europeans who dubbed it as 'a victory for Mau Mau' and attacked the British volte face. Ngala, on the other hand, claimed triumphantly that the 'European domination had been broken.' The fond hope of Uhuru in not so distant a future gave a new fillip to the efforts of Africans. A new mass organization—Kenya African National Union (K.A.N.U.) incorporating the members of the K.A.U., was formed in March 1960, with Kenyatta as its President. Gichuru was, however, to act in his place until his release from prison. Soon, however, there was a split in K.A.N.U., and another party Kenya African Democratic Union (K.A.D.U.) was formed with the aim of opposing K.A.N.U.

1.7.2 *Uhuru*—Kenyatta as the First Prime Minister

In the 1961 elections, K.A.N.U., dominated the K.A.D.U., and in June 1963, Kenyatta became Kenya's first Prime Minister. Finally, on December 12, 1963, Kenya gained its much awaited Uhuru.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed the various meanings of the term 'the dark continent' as applied to Africa and also the political objectives of emphasising – by the Europeans—the primitiveness of the continent. We have cited the arguments of Cheikh Anta Diop who counters this hypothesis by showing that it is the Africans who set up the ancient Egyptian Civilization. We have also discussed, though very briefly, the process of colonization of Africa by various European powers from 15th century onwards.

This Unit also traces the history of Kenya since its pre-historic days, focussing on, primarily the colonization by the British, the freedom struggle including the Mau Mau Movement and the eventual independence of Kenya in 1963.

1.9 QUESTIONS

1. What are the implications of the term 'dark' in the expression 'the dark continent' as applied to Africa?

2. Why was the myth of primitivism of Africa created? What is meant by the Expression 'whiteman's burden'?

3. What is Cheikh Anta Diop's main argument about Africa's past?

4. When did the Europeans first come in contact with Africa and which was the first European power to colonize parts of Africa?

5. What was the social and political nature of societies in pre-historic Kenya?

6. What was the model of followed by the British in colonizing Kenya?

7. What was the major impact of settling Europeans in Kenya?

8. In what ways did the Kenyans resist the colonial administration?

9. What was the Mau Mau Movement? What did it achieve and how?

1.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 LITERATURE AND POLITICS

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Literature—Nature and Functions
  2.2.1 Literature and Truth
  2.2.2 Literature and Society
  2.2.3 Literature and Reality
2.3 Literature and the Creative Process
2.4 Literature and the Writer's Attitude
2.5 Literature and Subjectivism
  2.5.1 Literature and Naturalism
  2.5.2 Literature and Neutrality
2.6 African Literature, Politics and Ideology
2.7 Let Us Sum Up
2.8 Questions
2.9 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to focus on the relationship between literature and politics, literature and reality, the creative process and the relationship between literature and ideology. All this is of theoretical significance for the study of *A Grain of Wheat.*

2.1 INRODUCTION

Literature and politics may appear to be--to some they definitely do--two aspects of human experience which are on the very face of it, irreconcilable. While literature is considered to represent one of the highest forms of the development of aesthetic sensibility of a society, politics is considered to be the playfield of the cunning and the low. To the advocates of such views it may, therefore, appear blasphemous to even put the two words--'literature' and 'politics'--close to each other. Hence, it is not very surprising to come across advice generally given to writers by some fellow scribes and also by certain sections of the society at large to not only shun politics in real life but also to hold a position of strict political neutrality in their writings. According to these self-styled well-wishers of writers, writing should be for writing's own sake.

2.2 LITERATURE--NATURE AND FUNCTIONS

However, a closer look at the nature and functions of literature will highlight the fact that such a position of irreconcilability of literature and politics is not only untenable but is also highly undesirable. A piece of literature representing one of the highest forms of development of human sensibility is a social phenomenon. It is written by someone, for someone to read and is meant to convey something. It is therefore a deliberate act of social communication. And as for its author, he too is a social being--member of a certain class--who is conditioned by the historical and politico-economic circumstances of his times. Therefore, events in the history of a society--

great or small--cannot but be a source of inspiration to its writers. Any serious work of literature, created as it is within the framework of existing social relations, is not only a living document of the contemporary happenings but also of the historical processes underlying them.

2.2.1 Literature and Truth

Literature develops along with life as writers try to meet the challenge of their time, tell the readers the truth--their truth--about the world, current events as also about themselves and voice their concern about the future--a truth without which mankind cannot advance. The great epics and tragedies of ancient Greece, rich in variety, lofty in thought and universal in comprehension as they are, also reflect the ancient Greek civilisation. In fact, we learn from them as much, if not more, about the Greek society of the times. The great Renaissance that swept through Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, too had its counterparts in the fields of fine arts and literature, producing such giants like Leonardo da Vinci, Dante, Michaelangelo and Shakespeare. Blake Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley owe so much to the French Revolution. Balzac believed that to be productive one needed only to study the French society which should be "the historian, I only its amanuensis." For this, he won the highest praise from Engels who said that one could learn more about the French society from him "than from all the professional historians, economists and statisticians of the period together." Marx had earlier paid a similar tribute to the major English novelists of the nineteenth century whose "eloquent and graphic portrayals of the world have revealed more political and social truths than all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together." An artist, therefore, concerns himself with what Chinua Achebe has called "the most burning questions of the day."

2.2.2 Literature and Society

"The relationship between art and society", as a prominent literary theorist puts it, "cannot be ignored, for art itself is a social phenomenon. First, because the artist, however unique his primary experience might be, is a social being; second, because his work, however deeply marked by his primary experience and however unique and unrepeatable its objectification or form might be, is always a bridge, a connecting link between the artist and other members of society; third, because a work of art affects people--it contributes to the reaffirmation or devaluation of their ideas, goals or values--and is a social force which has its emotional or ideological weight, shakes or moves people. No body remains the same after having been deeply moved by a true work of art."

But what is it in a piece of literature that makes it exert this Ancient Mariner-like influence on its readers who, like the wedding guest, do not remain the same even after a chance acquaintance with it? It is the depiction of the social facts--the reality of the times--and the manner in which they are depicted that enables a writer to leave such an indelible impression on the psyche of not only individual readers but the entire community as well.

2.2.3 Literature and Reality

What, however, is this reality that a writer must contend with and reflect in his writings? Reality refers to, firstly, the knowledge of life's development in general and secondly to its concrete phenomena at a given time. The first is essential because knowledge of life is the main source from which a work of literature draws its strength and its writer his power of conviction. The second refers to the historically relative understanding of the truth at the moment when a particular literary product comes into being. In order to reflect this reality in his works, a writer, therefore, captures the essential features of the epoch's great events--their strength as well as weaknesses. Tolstoy, for instance, is great because of the "depth and impressiveness

with which the epoch is described," (Scherbina, 1974:20) and "the truthfulness with which he rendered the contradictions and the ruthless breaking up of the old established order that took place in post-reform Russia". The portrayal of reality, in other words, involves highlighting the important problems of the people and new aspects of life.

Creating a piece of realistic literature, however, does not mean merely bringing direct recollections of the external world into the work in a mechanistic manner, for to do so will be to write a piece of history, and literature and history, though having much in common, are two distinct disciplines. A writer, unlike a historian, is not obliged to consider the whole range of facts pertaining to a given event or phenomenon. He can afford to concentrate on a single fact, a single event, a single life. The roles of the writer and the historian can be distinguished from each other's on the lines suggested by Aristotle for a distinction between history and poetry:

> Historians and poets do not differ in the fact that the latter writes in verse, the former in prose.... The difference lies rather in the fact that one reports what actually happened, the other what could happen. Thus poetry is more philosophical than history, for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.

2.3 LITERATURE AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

A writer sees before him the immediate, concrete reality but he does not, unlike the historian, remain on that plane for long. He moves away, going beyond the objective concreteness to what may be termed as the level of artistic concreteness. At this level of artistic concreteness, the writer creates a world of his own, a world in which through the creation of individual characters--imaginary or real, or both--he investigates the social being of man and the role of certain sections of society in history, the conflicts of their interests and the nature of their clashes and cleavages. It is through the study of these characters that a writer gives us an idea of the mentality of a people, their moral attitudes, their ideals and aspirations. It is with this intention that a Macbeth, or a Juliet, a Don Quixote or a Faust, an Okonkwo or a Gikonyo, a Lawino or a Muthoni, a Hori or a Mitro has been created. Through each one of them, the writer distills the historically significant phenomena and also reveals the links between literature and society. Each of these characters gives us a glimpse into the various stages of socio-political development and evolution of epochs. It is, therefore, by going 'beyond' that a writer rises to a universal level where a new artistic reality is born, a reality which is not very different from the objective one which delimits the range of history but which is aesthetically interpreted.

Depicting reality, therefore, is a process of creation and not of imitation. It is an act which serves as a bridge, linking the writer with the society not only at a given time but across time and social divisions. It is an act which portrays life in motion and in a perspective that through the depiction of the particular, expresses simultaneously the regular, the universal and the typical. To attain this level of realistic depiction is, however, by no means an easy task and a writer, in its pursuit, passes through various stages: at the first stage, a writer singles out and records what he believes to be most important and characteristic out of the diversity of facts and the chaos of every day life. He finds, as Gorky expected of him, "that which is of general significance in life typical not for given day alone." However, this preliminary stage is only a prelude to a more important second stage when a writer creates his own particular world of images, and peoples it with characters, situations and actions so that the apparent contradictions between the particular and the general, the immediate and the conceptual may be so resolved as to give an impression of an inseparable integrity. It examines individual human relationships to discover that the particular and the general merge in an organic and dynamic way. At the final stage of creation, the

impressions and images are structured in accordance with the principles of harmony and what Leo Tolstoy called, "sense of proportion". It is at this stage that a unity of form and content is achieved to make the work an organic whole.

2.4 LITERATURE AND THE WRITER'S ATTITUDE

The writer's attitude plays a very crucial role in depicting this reality. In fact, no correct evaluation of a book or a writer is possible without probing into the writer's attitude to life because a piece of literature is not merely a dream but an act of deliberate communication, a choice of verbal gesture for advocating a certain point of view. In the words of Joan Rockwell, "for the student who wishes to use literature as a key to the specific values of a period or cultural area, the point is to discover the author's intentions." (*Fact in Fiction p.60*) That is why books written on the same theme by different authors turn out to be different in quality and value. An artist must so create his works that they may give men happiness; not merely depict misery and injustice but also show them the way to fight it and make the world to be more just, more happy, more full of dreams. Since dreams--those fond hopes of future--are also an integral part of life, a writer must talk of them too. As Wole Soyinka puts it, a writer is not just "the recorder of the mores and experiences of his society" but also "the voice of vision in his own time." (Peterson, 1988 p. 7) He must not shirk from looking into the face of the future and discovering for his readers, new shoots of life, because the future is as perfectly real as the present. "Real poetry", said Lenin, "must always get ahead of life, if only by an hour." (Scherbina, 1974 p.9)

Reality so depicted will be of a higher order, a new reality which will give us truths about men in flesh and blood, living in a given society, in historically and socially conditioned human relationships, and about the sufferings, struggles and rejoicings.

However, a number of writers as well as theorists have denied any essential or even "desirable" links between literature and reality thereby banishing the notion of realism from the sphere of art and literature. To take up some of their basic objections, one of them is against realist art because it is "an art for the plebians, for the masses, for those poor in spirit," (Scherbina, 1974 p. 36) implying thereby that pursuit of art and literature is essentially an elitist activity. "Realists", they allege, "are always simple observers while symbolists are always thinkers. Realists are in the grip of concrete life, it washes over them like the surf and they see nothing behind it." (Scherbina, 1974 p. 37)

2.5 LITERATURE AND SUBJECTIVISM

Such an attitude towards reality and its role in creation of literature leads to positions of subjectivism which stem from a thinking that art is basically irrational and that ideological, political and social questions are foreign to its nature. It is, above all, the expression of an artist's isolated subjective impressions, no matter whether they correspond to the real image of the objective world or not. This is primarily done to assert the seeming independence of creativity. The high priest of such a point of view is Benidetto Croce who seeks to dissociate literature completely from history, restricting it solely to the intuition and individuality of the writer. Croce, in fact, goes on to deny any aesthetic progress of mankind, asserting that every individual creates his own artistic world and that works of art and literature are in no way linked with any tradition. An extreme position in this was, however, taken by Lipps, who said, "The inner form of an object is always determined by me, through my inner activity."

2.5.1 Literature and Naturalism

At the other extreme of this position of subjectivism is the position of complete objectivity--of naturalism--according to the pursuers of which the only way of obtaining true impressions of life and its reality is to act as simple direct, lifeless and passive mirrors, reflecting all happenings around, without playing an active role in either organising them according to their importance or selecting them according to their relevance. The writer, they believe, is like a mobile camera, recording at random, the myriad impressions of life; and this, they again believe, is the only way of portraying reality. A natural corollary of such a position is that a writer should maintain a strict neutrality between various points of view concerning a particular issue, presenting them all equally eloquently and leaving it to the readers to draw their own conclusions. Support to any one point of view, they contend, will reduce literature to social and political propaganda.

The fact, however, is that such a collage of photographic details may not have any direct bearing on life and its reality, since it is neither history nor literature. It neither selects facts, as a historian does, nor does it place them in an imaginative context, as does a writer. Speaking of Balzac, Oscar Wilde observed that he was "no mere reporter. Photography and proces verbal were not the essentials of his method. Observation gave him the facts of life, but his genius converted facts into truths and truths into truth". Wilde drives the point home in his characteristic style by drawing a distinction between Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Balzac's *Illusions Perudues.* The former he calls a piece of "unimaginative realism" and the latter "imaginative reality."

2.5.2 Literature and Neutrality

As for maintaining strict neutrality between various points of view, such a position is contrary to the reality of life wherein everyone is forced to take sides all the time on all kinds of issues. We have the testimony of no less a celebrity than Thomas Mann who in his *Kultur und Politik* recognises the fact that "being apolitical is nothing less than being simply antidemocratic." Mann, starting from *Reflections of an Apolitical Man*--the title speaks for itself--learnt his lessons the hard way, because he was born and brought up in the spiritual traditions of German burgher society. He was forced to admit that "I arrived at the conviction that what is political and social is an indivisible part of what is human and enters into the one problem of humanism, into which our intellect must include it, and that in this problem a dangerous hiatus destructive for culture may manifest itself if we ignore the political, social elements inherent to it." (*Aesthetics and Poetics, p.*16) Earlier, Romain Rolland who too had opined that a writer should remain uncommitted, revised his opinion about the neutrality of a writer. Howard Fast illustrates the point through the example of portraying a workers' strike: "A motion picture camera may preserve the strike as a partial abstraction; but this would be neither art nor truth. To become art the strike must be related to historical process and that relationship can hardly be neutral." (*Literature and Reality, p.* 20-21)

A completely neutral stand is, therefore, myth. Chinua Achebe, using rather strong language for his otherwise mild manner of expression has called such "neutral" art as "deodorised dog-shit." In fact, to be neutral as a matter of principle is in itself a partisan position. A writer, therefore, has to make a choice between the responsibility of siding with truth, justice and humaneness or standing in open favour of exploitation and injustice. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o puts it:

> ...literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battlefield: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to

remain neutral. *Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics. (Writers in Politics, preface)*

2.6 AFRICAN LITERATURE POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY

In the case of African literature, politics has always been of paramount significance. Alex La Guma, renowned novelist from South Africa has put it in a most dramatic manner:

> I, as a South African writer, am prepared TO RUN GUNS AND HOLD UP RADIO STATIONS, because in South Africa that is what we are faced with, whether we are writers or whether we are common labourers. ("The Writer in Modern Africa" p.20)

The question of ideology--the author's intention or attitude--to which we have made a reference above, is an integral part of this relationship between literature and politics. In the case of African literature this question of ideological stand-point of the writer although implicit in the very social nature of literature, became prominent in the context of the various freedom struggles and it continued to remain relevant in the post-independence period as well, as the gap between the affluent few and pauper majority widened alarmingly and as the infrastructure of ethics crumbled. As Alex La Guma puts it, "when we sit down to write a book, I or any of my colleagues around me, we are, as writers, faced with the reality that 80% of the population lives below the bread-line standard." (Wetberg, 1988:20)

It is within this broad-based framework of relationship between literature and politics rather than any specific theory of literature that this book attempts to evaluate the major writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

However, before we analyse the writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, it would only be appropriate to look at the grafting and development of novel as a genre on the African soil, particularly in the sub-Saharan region. This we will do in the next Unit.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have looked at the definitions of literature, politics, their respective natures, and also the relationship between literature and truth, literature and reality, literature and subjectivity, literature and naturalism, literature and neutrality. We have also discussed the political nature of African literature and its ideological content.

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. Why is it that literature and politics are considered to be incompatible?
2. What is the nature and function of literature in society?
3. What is relationship between literature and truth, literature and reality and literature and subjectivity?
4. Comment on the ideological nature of African literature.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 MODERN NOVEL IN AFRICA

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Africa—the First Storytellers
  3.1.1 Orature—the Tradition of Narrating Orally
3.2 Africa—First Written Narratives
  3.2.1 Literacy and the Bible—European Missionaries
3.3 Africa—First Publications in English : *Ethiopia Unbound, Eighteen Pence*
3.4 African Writings as part of National Struggles
  3.4.1 Professionals' and Writers' Meets in Paris,Rome-- International links
  3.4.2 Goals of African Literatures—Social, Cultural and Political
  3.4.3 The Language Question – Mediums of Creative Writings
3.5 The Rise of Modern Novel in Africa
  3.5.1 Assimilating Native Traditions of Narration
3.6 Some Early Novels
  3.6.1 *Things Fall Apart*—Encounter with Europe as a Theme
  3.6.2 Early writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o
  3.6.3 South Africa—Racial Clash as Fiction: Paton, La Guma, Gordime
  3.6.4 Corruption as a Major Theme of Post-Independence African Fiction
  3.6.5 The Emergence of the Political Novel—Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*
  3.6.6 Fiction by African Women
3.7 Let Us Sum Up
3.8 Questions
3.9 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The principal objective of this Unit is to focus on the tradition of narration in Africa. The tradition that was primarily oral, became written after the arrival of first the Arabs who introduced the Arabic language and also its script and later by the Europeans who introduced literacy in order to enable them to read the Bible. Still later, they introduced their respective system of education, as a part of which the Africans were exposed to their literatures. The British for instance introduced as a part of the educational requirements, texts like the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*. These in turn became the role models when the first samples of fiction by Africans written in English appeared.

The Unit also discusses briefly the various stages through which the African novel in English passed and the major themes it embraced at various points of time. It also takes note of fiction writing by African women.

3.1 AFRICA—THE FIRST STORYTELLERS

If what the anthropologists tell us is true that man first appeared on the African continent, then the credit for being the first fiction-artist must also go to an African, since the art of story-telling is as old as man. Thus, it may not be difficult to visualize a group of people—not just children—gathered around a person—most probably a man but could as well be a woman—in the fading light of the evening after the day's work—of hunting but could also be of fruit-gathering—had been done and requesting him to tell of his hunting experience. Exaggerating a little here to enhance his valour and understating a little there to minimize his sense of fear and cowardice, the man narrates the factual experience of a hunt. On another occasion, the person not only

exaggerated a little here and understated a little there but he also supplied a few details that never occurred, slipping them into his narrative in such a manner that it was difficult to separate one from the other—those that actually happened from those that never happened. Thus was born the first fiction-artist of Africa—and of the world.

3.1.1 Orature—the Tradition of Narrating Orally

We have used the expression 'story-teller' or 'fiction-artist' and not the expression 'fiction-writer', for this was in the oral tradition of narration. The oral tradition as the only mode of narration was to last millenia in the case of Africa and in many cases still continues to be the only mode of creating stories or songs. In course of time there grew not only a sizeable body of significant oral narratives—orature—but also groups of professional narrators—the griot, the babalawo and Giccandi players—who moved from place to place in various African societies and narrated these tales.

3.2 AFRICA—FIRST WRITTEN NARRATIVES

However, it was with the coming of outsiders—primarily invaders, although some came for trade alone as well, the Chinese or the Indians for instance—that written forms of narration were introduced into the cultural soil of Africa. Contrary to popular impression, those who introduced scripts for African languages for the first time were not Europeans but Arabs who came down from the North to invade, convert and set up kingdoms for continued economic exploitation. Thus Hausa, a language of the people living in northern parts of Nigeria, acquired a script—the Arabic script. Thus Swahili—a trade patois spoken on the coast from Mombassa to Zanzibar—also became a written language with the help of the Arabic script.

However, literary activity in these and other similar languages was only scanty, at best. With the coming of Europeans towards the end of the 15th century—the Portuguese under Vasco-da-Gama were perhaps among the very first—European languages were introduced on the continent of Africa. Within a couple of hundred years the continent was abuzz with Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, German, Flemish and Italian.

3.2.1 Literacy and the Bible—European Missionaries

It was the missionaries from different parts of Europe who entered various regions of Africa on the apparent pretext of bringing enlightenment to its people who brought literacy to Africa. The Bible had to be read. The weekly sermon by the priest was a written discourse read aloud to the congregation. This in turn led to a number of significant developments: first, the Bible had to be translated into various African languages, most of which did not have a script. So scripts were either invented or adapted for these languages before such translations could be undertaken. Thus, the 'credit' of transforming a large number of African societies from oral to written, from pre-literate to literate goes to these missionaries. In the meantime, the Africans were encouraged by the missionaries to learn to read the word in European languages as well. Thus the reading—and writing too—of English, French, Portuguese, etc., was introduced by the missionaries. By this time, most parts of the continent had been colonized for economic exploitation through either guile or force or both. The exploitation needed to be perpetuated and that could only be done by controlling not just the bodies but the minds of Africans. Hence, western systems of education were introduced to instil into the minds of Africans the superiority—economic, political, social, cultural and ideological—of the western ways of life, thereby filling their minds—simultaneously—with a sense of inferiority about all things and ideas which were African. Teaching and learning of European languages and literatures—English, French and Portuguese—became a pa of the school education curricula. *Pilgrim's*

Progress by Bunyan, for instance, became an almost essential text in various parts of British Africa. It is, therefore, no surprise that when the first generation of African literates—those 'been-no's, as they came to be known in the English parts of Africa—came to write their first narratives in English, these were based on *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible.

3.3 AFRICA—FIRST PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH: *ETHIOPIA UNBOUND, EIGHTEENPENCE*

Since this missionary activity on the continent began in a big way in the 19th century primarily on the west coast—Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, etc.—where the 'freed' slaves had been settled, it is only natural that the first education facilities by westerners were also introduced in the same region and in course of time the first shoots of creative writing also sprouted from the same soil.
E. Casely-Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* published in 1911 is perhaps the first long narrative in prose by an African. The book is a 'hotch-potch of ideas' wherein Casely-Hayford tries to focus on a number of contemporary issues including education, christianity and colonialism. The modes of narration too vary from realistic to fantastic.

R.E.Obeng's *Eighteenpence*(1943) is considered by some to be closer to what may be called modern African novel rather than Casely-Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound*. The book is an allegory where characters are representatives of qualities. The influence of the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress* is more obvious in *Eighteenpence* than on *Ethiopia Unbound*.

Both these writers paved the way for the first major narrative to be recognized as a novel: Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard*.

3.4 AFRICAN WRITINGS AS PART OF NATIONAL STRUGGLES

As we have stated in the introduction, literary activity by modern African writers—including that of novelists—began in a big way only after the second world war, primarily as a result of the conscious decisions by emigrant Africans in Europe who under the inspiration of thinkers like Amie Caesar, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fannon and George Padmore, opened a 'second front' as it were, and stepped up their cultural activities to assist the freedom struggles in their respective counties back home. As Amilca Cabral put it, national liberation movements are "the organized political expression of the struggling people's culture." This, however, is not to give an impression that there were no literary activities in various parts of Africa before this. But with only forty nine of seven hundred odd African languages having been subject to a written form, the literary efforts in pre-colonial Africa were primarily oral and a rich body of what Ngugi wa Thiong'o called orature had existed in most African societies. There were of course languages like Swahili and Hausa in East and West Africa respectively and Sesotho in South Africa which had the tradition of written literature.

3.4.1 Professionals' and Writers' Meets in Paris, Rome—International Links

A formal status to the efforts of emigrant Africans was accorded when in 1956, a meeting was organized in Sorbonne, Paris under the auspices of "Presence Africaine" a journal devoted to various aspects of Africa and its people that was being published

from there under the editorship of Alioune Diop. The meeting adopted a resolution that stated, among others, that there was no nation with culture, no culture without a past and no authentic cultural liberation was possible without political liberation first. This meeting was followed by a second one in Rome in 1959, which proclaimed, among others, that 'political independence and economic freedom are indispensable prerequisites of fecund cultural development in underdeveloped countries in general and in the countries of black Africa in particular.'

Political scientists like Phillipe Decreane and Thomas Hodgking, writers like Jean Paul Sartre and critics like Lilyan Kesteloot recognized immediately the significance of such literary efforts. Phillipe Decreane, for instance, considered Sehghor's theory of negritude as the literary counterpart of Pan Africanism whereas Ms. Kesteloot opined that African writers "have produced original works only when they have become politically committed."
Soon this body of African writers forged links with others in underdeveloped countries, particularly of Asia, and a larger body of Afro-Asian writers came about whose initial meetings were held in New Delhi in 1956, Tashkent in 1958 and Cairo in 1962.

3.4.2 Goals of African Literatures—Social, Cultural and Political

Thus literary rejuvenation in Africa became a part of a large cultural renaissance that had evolved close links with political struggles of various countries on other continents. An African writer, therefore, used his pen not only like the barrel of a gun but he also carried a pen in one hand and a gun in the other—literally. Sedor Senghor, Augustino Neto, Mamadu Dia, Tafawa Balewa, Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah were not only the first ranking political leaders of their respective countries but their leading writers as well. The aims of African writers –novelists included— were, therefore, overtly political and there were three prinicipal reasons for which they wrote, each of which was implied in the resolution quoted above. These were first to bring out the rich cultural heritage of Africa to debunk the colonial propaganda that Africa had no culture, no history, no past and that Europeans had intervened in Africa to "civilize" it. Critics have called this phenomenon as "Prospero Syndrome." This had led to distortions and even halting of their cultural development under the policies of cultural imperialism pursued by the colonial powers of which creating a class of "been to's" evolues and assimilados were the extreme forms. The second aim of these writers was, therefore, to step up the struggle for their cultural liberation. However, since no 'authentic cultural liberation' was possible without political liberation first, the third and the most significant aim of these writers was to support their respective national liberation movements. In this, they were inspired by the writings and research of Cheikh Anta Diop from Senegal who had collected adequate evidence from the fields of anthropology, archaeology, language, literature and history to assert that the ancient Egyptian Civilization had been set up and developed by black Africans. The hands of modern African writers – including those of novelists—were therefore quite full with political commitments from the very beginning.

3.4.3 The Language Question—Mediums of Creative Writings

Before moving on to the examination of the rise and development of novel in Africa, let us make a few observations about the choice of languages by African writers for their creative writings. This like the other observations about African writers affected the novelists as well. Since the aims for which African writers had taken to writing were overtly political, they had to choose the mediums of their creative works keeping such objectives in mind. Since their primary objectives were to aid and assist their respective national liberation struggles, they needed to reach their messages— which were not only to inform about their cultures, their histories and their pasts but also the present state of affairs under colonialism—to the educated, politically aware and liberal minded people in the ruling countries so as to create an empathy for their

cause of political independence. Thus they chose the languages of their European masters—English, French, Portuguese—as the vehicles of their thoughts. Simultaneously, they also wanted to reach that limited section of the reading public in their own countries—those "been to's" and assimilados—who had lost faith in their own cultures and their pasts and who were not only resigned to their colonized fate but who were also "sold" to it, thanks to the impact of European education systems and the accompanying crumbs. In short, such writings were also aimed at what Ngugi wa Thiong'o has called "decolonizing the mind" of the African educated middle class. Then there was, of course, the third reason on a number of African languages lacking a script and hence the inability of many a writer to adopt it as the medium of expressing his creative abilities. This question of the choice of European languages was later to develop into a big controversy, particularly among novelists like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Nurudin Farah. The choice, we may say, to conclude the debate on this point, was made consciously and after careful considerations, keeping in mind the then objectives of supporting political struggles in various parts of Africa.

3.5 THE RISE OF MODERN NOVEL IN AFRICA

The rise of the novel as a genre in Africa coincided with the rise of African intelligentsia whose members were—primarily—the products of mission-run schools who had been fed on the staple diet of the Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. And the time too was of violent social upheaval not only in Africa but all around the world. After the end of the second world war, the Soviet Union had emerged as a global power and had become a rallying force not only for a large number of newly independent nations but also for those who were still struggling for political independence in Asia, Africa and Latin America. A socialist revolution had succeeded in China. India and a number of nations in Asia had gained freedom from colonial rule. The Vietnamese had defeated the French. The economies of colonial powers lay in shambles. All this had great morale-boosting impact on the African bourgeoisie which was leading these struggles for political independence. They realized, perhaps for the first time, that the Mzungu—that's the Swahili word for the white men—were after all not invincible. Sensing success, they stepped up their struggles. Members of the intelligentsia, the literary counterparts of the African bourgeoisie, too had been inspired by these events and also by the role played by their counterparts elsewhere, particularly in Asia. We have already referred to the beginning and developing of such contacts between writers of Africa and Asia at conferences in New Delhi, Tashkent and Cairo.

3.5.1 Assimilating Native Traditions of Narration

The genre of novel is a European transplant in Africa since, its birth coincided with the arrival of literacy and the western systems of education based on it. However, the transplant could sink its roots very quickly into the soil and soon threw around new shoots primarily because the soil was very conducive to its growth. The tradition of long narratives—both in prose and in poetry—had existed in most African societies for long. In fact, in some societies this tradition had been formally institutionalized through professional narrators—the Griot singers and the Giccandi players, for instance—who moved from place to place very much like our own sankirtan jathas, or singers of Hari Katha or the baul singers of Bengal. These folk narratives themselves were open-ended and individual narrators kept on varying the text spatially and temporally by adding episodes and incidents of local and contemporary interests. This provided the narrator with ample opportunities to give free reins to his fertile imagination and interpolate the text thereby secularizing it in the process. Let us add here that these narrators combined in themselves the functions of singers of epics, social chroniclers and the reciters on specific religious occasions. Now the first novels in Africa could and did draw their strength form the tradition of such

narratives whose taproots had been buried deep for centuries. It is no wonder, therefore, that early African novels drew their sustenance from fables, folk tales, proverbs, sayings and similar cultural material. Let us illustrate this point by taking a couple of examples from the Nigerian novel.

3.6 SOME EARLY NOVELS

One of the first novels to come out of Nigeria in the fifties—1952, to be precise—was *The Palm Wine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola. In fact, many scholars consider Tutuola to be the grand sire of modern fiction in Africa. The novel created a sensation. Before elaborating on that let us look at a small excerpt from the novel:

> I was a palm wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm wine in my life...My father got eight children and I was the eldest among them, all of the rest were hard working, but I myself was an expert palm wine drinkard...(Tutuola, 1952:7)

The novel was praised and condemned simultaneously—of course by different groups of people—for the same feature but again for wrong reasons. Tutuola's writer colleagues most of whom had been to the mission-run schools and the university—Tutuola unfortunately had not gone beyond class six—were embarrassed by his 'irregular' use of English. His western critics, however, hailed it as a novel use of English. Dylan Thomas referred to it as "young English by a West African" and Anthony West saw in it "the very beginnings of literature". However, they all agreed on one thing: that *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was some kind of a "freakish first" which was an "unrepeatable happy hit." However, Tutuola repeated the hit no less than five times after the publication of *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. It was then that it dawned on both his Nigerian colleagues as well as western critics that there was more to the novel than just its plain bad English. And that something more was the Yoruba folk material that Tutuola had so cleverly built into his narrative, bending the structure of English language as well as of the novel as a form to carry the burden of his narrative. And it was in this that the strength of the novel lay and not in its bad English. In this respect Tutuola was a path breaker who had grafted successfully the African narrative on to the western novel and the mutated form—although still called a novel—was soon adopted by his successors not only in Nigeria but all over Africa.

3.6.1 *Things Fall Apart*—Encounter with Europe as a Theme

Chinua Achebe was perhaps among the first to notice the immense possibility of such "hybridization". He, however, avoided the most obvious of Tutuola's pitfalls namely his "unacceptable" English. In his first novel—*Things Fall Apart* published in 1958, six years after the publications of *The Palm Wine Drinkard*—Achebe replaced Tutuola's crooked English sentence structure by simple, crisp, short but correct structures and he Yoruba folk material by his own Ibo myths and fables, customs and rituals, superstitions and sayings. The result has been there for everyone to see. Hailed as a modern classic, *Things Fall Apart* has been translated into scores of modern major languages of the world—and some minor ones too—and has sold more copies than any other modern novel. On the continent, it replaced Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as an almost compulsory school text. However, it was not only in matters of language and style that Achebe had differed from Tutuola. If it were so, Achebe would be a poor pupil and not the trend setter that he became with his first novel. More significantly, Achebe had altered the political agenda with his *Things Fall Apart*. Updating his theme, Achebe had chosen the "encounter" phase of Nigerian history as the subject of his novel—an encounter between the Ibos of Umuofia and the white missionaries and administrators. Universalising his theme as any great writer does. Achebe preseated this encounter as an encounter between Africa and

Europe, between two different races and above all between two different ways of life. Through his sociological details—and there is no dearth of them including the copious use of Ibo proverbs and for which Achebe was accused of being an ancestor-worshipper and a supporter of the raffia skirt culture—Achebe was proving the political point that Africans were no "yesterday people" and that African history was not, to borrow his own words, "one long night of savagery." However, Achebe, unlike Tutuola, was not prepared to present the African past uncritically. Okonkwo and the Umuofian people with their obstinacy and a rigid way of life as their besetting flaw are as much responsible for the tragic going under of their society as are the white colonizers with their superior technology. As stated above, Achebe's reference to his past did not go down well with a number of his critics, particularly the European ones. Apparently, some of them could see through Achebe's clever use of invocation of his past to subserve his present political ends. They had, for instance, not objected to Tutuola's invocation of the Yoruba past.

3.6.2 Early Writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

It is by foregrounding the colonization of Africa on the agenda of African fiction writing that Achebe became the trend-setter and many novelists across the continent began to write similar novels. So significant had been his influence that six years later when Ngugi wa Thiong'o was writing his first novel—*The River Between*—on the eve of Kenyan Uhuru he modelled it on *Things Fall Apart*. Ngugi's portrayal of the "encounter" between the Gikuyu and the white missionaries has been considered to be so exact a parallel to Achebe's depiction of the encounter between the Ibo and the whites that some critics have considered *The River Between* stepping out of the very pages of *Things Fall Apart*. This, however, is an exaggeration because Ngugi's novel, drawing as it does, its inspiration from Achebe's novel, is very different from *Things Fall Apart* in more than one ways. The hero of *The River Between*—Waiaki—unlike Okonkwo is a child of two worlds: he is the son of a traditional Gikuyu religious leader and a mundo mugo but is educated at a mission-run school. The white missionaries have not only already arrived in Makuyu-Kameno region but have already entrenched themselves by winning themselves a few converts like Joshua. The "encounter" has already developed into a full-fledged "conflict"—the immediate provocation being the custom of female circumcision which is condemned by the white missionaries as "savage" and "barbaric". Ngugi, in fact, deliberately chose this custom of circumcising the girl-child as the basis of the conflict since it had its roots in Kenya's recent history. Female circumcision had been a major point of conflict between the various Kenyan tribes and the British colonial administration. It had led to drastic divide—the setting up of Independent schools and even Independent churches by the Kenyans—thereby radicalizing their struggle for political independence in order to save their cultural independence. It was something which, as we have mentioned earlier, had been on the original political agenda of African writers since the early fifties. Ngugi's theme, therefore, is not only more complex that that of Achebe's but it also lays more stress on the conflict aspect of the encounter by mixing myth with reality, Lord Gikuyu with Jomo Kenyatta. And again, Ngugi is more radical in expressing his views about the havoc wrought by colonialism than the mild-mannered Achebe. But perhaps it was the model of colonialism in East Africa which was responsible for stronger political overtones of East African writers. East Africa, unlike its western counterpart, had to contend with the additional menace of 'settlers' which made their freedom struggle much more complicated and difficult. Freedom struggles in neither Ghana nor in Nigeria had to go through as violent and bloody a phase as the so-called Mau Mau struggle in Kenya between 1952 and 1957. The greater intensity of the political struggle had, of course, brought rich dividends for Kenyan writers of fiction. A number of Kenyan novelists—Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Meja Mwangi or Godwin Wachira, for instance—built their central works around the theme of Mau Mau.

3.6.3 South Africa—Racial Clash as Fiction: Paton, La Guma, Gordime

Whether it is *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o or *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) and *Taste of Death* (1975) both by Meja Mwangi or *Ordeal in the Forest* (1967) by Godwin Wachira, the emphasis is on "protest"—something which East African fiction of the sixties shares more with South African fiction rather than with West African writings. Protest as the major theme of their writings was included from the very beginning of their careers, by major South African writers whether white or black or coloured or even by those of Indian origin. This was primarily due to the policy of apartheid—separate development—pursued by successive racist South African governments since 1948. We shall not go into the implications of this policy for the people of South Africa here since these are too well-known. However, what we would certainly like to comment upon is its implications for writers in South Africa, particularly the novelists. The policy of Apartheid by keeping various communities apart on the basis of pigmentation and enforcing it ruthlessly through scores of draconian laws had insulated South African writers from one another's world and had forced them to write in a "fractured society" about a "fractured society." As Nadine Gordimer who by being both white and a woman represents a minority within a minority, put it –

> Living in a society that has been as deeply and calculatedly compartmentalized as South Africa's has been under the colour bar, the writer's potential has unscaleable limitations. (*Literature and Society in South Africa, p.* 161)

Alex La Guma, who as per South African labellings was a coloured writer, observed that –

> The problem is living in one set of compartments and knowing only of your own life, and then trying to inject yourself into the life of the environment of another part, another party. (*Literature and Society in South Africa, p.* 161)

The result is that early writings of Alan Paton—*Cry the Beloved Country*, for instance—and Nadine Gordimer's— *Burger's Daughter* or the short stories, for instance—get labelled as white writings, whereas those of Peter Abrahams—*Mine Boy*, or *Tell Freedom*, for instance—and those of Alex La Guma—*A Walk in the Night* and *A Threefold Cord*, for instance—belong to the coloured constituency.

As observed above, the basic political agenda of these novels was "protest." However, the manner of protest by each one of them was her or his own, governed by her or his *welt anschaaung* which in turn depended on which side of the colour bar you actually were.

3.6.4 Corruption as a Major Theme of Post-Independence African Fiction

As the sixties neared, African hopes soared. Uhuru was in the air. Ghana got its independence in 1957 and Nigeria in 1960. The process of the decolonization of Africa had begun in a big way. As the people celebrated and waited with bated breath for the fulfilment of their dreams, it appeared that the committed African novelists, particularly of the protest and conflict variety would have to hang their spikes or at least change their tune if not the song. But as colonialists who had gone out of the front door sneaked in from the back door, and as bourgeoisie that had come to power in most newly independent countries of Africa changed to its true comprador character, as imperialism made inroads into Africa through various aid and trade agreements, democratic set ups in a large number of African countries, fragile as they were as yet, were threatened. As coup after coup took place in various countries, as military juntas tightened their grips over reins of political power, as unemployment figures soared and as corruption ruled rampant in these counties. as people's hopes

sank lower than their economic status, and as their dreams of an egalitarian society soured, the African writer was forced once again to wage yet another political battle—this time against the ruling cliques of his own fellow countrymen. Novelist after novelist made corruption, coups and cliques as the themes of their books. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by renowned Ghanaian writer A.K.Armah, is perhaps one of the most powerful portrayals of such situations. Achebe's *A Man of the People*. Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*, and *Kill Me Quick*, Mwangi Ruheni's *What a Life*, Sembene Ousmane's *Xala* and *Petals of Blood* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o are all novels written about the theme of corruption in various African nations.

Petals of Blood by Ngugi wa Thiong'o is quite different from the other novels not only in terms of his more radical and more openly pronounced views about the neo-colonialist regime of Kenya, but also in providing greater space to women and their problems. Wanja is as much the principal character of the novel as her male counterparts, Munira, Abdulla and Karega. In fact, she is one of the personas through which the author expresses his views about the neo-colonial phase of African governance. Not only Ngugi but a large number of other authors also came to focus on the problems of women, those doubly-disadvantaged victims of colonialism who were exploited first as black Africans and second for being women. Ngugi, Ekwensi, Ousmane, and Occuli have all made the problems of women in post-independence Africa, particularly their sexual exploitations, the bases of their novels.

3.6.5 The Emergence of the Political Novel in Africa—Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*

Finally, as neo-colonialism tightened its grip on Africa in the seventies and the eighties, as unpopular collaborationist regimes and military juntas failing to solve the basic problems of food, shelter and clothing of the masses, let loose more repression, as famine, hunger and civil war stalked the continent, the novelists further fine-tuned their songs. Novel and novelists both became politically more radical. In his *Devil on the Cross*, for instance, Ngugi builds the story around the worsening living conditions of ordinary Kenyans and blends it with generous use of technical terms of political analysis based on class. Written in the form of a political fable, it indicts the ruling comprador bourgeoisie through a satire that is, at times, as scathing as Swift's in *A Modest Proposal*. But the most significant feature—political—about *Devil on the Cross* was its original publication in Gikuyu, Ngugi's mother tongue. Ngugi had earlier decided to give up the use of English for his creative writing and the reasons he had cited were political. Continued use of English in free Kenya, he had said symbolized the colonized mind and had also alienated him from the Kenyan masses with whom he needed to interact in order to reach his political message to them. He, of course, drew a lot of flak for this decision of his, particularly from his fellow novelists. Nurudin Farah, for instance, criticised him very bitterly for becoming a "backwater fish". Even Chinua Achebe had reservations about this decision of his. However, the way his maiden attempt at novel writing in Gikuyu has been received has vindicated the political correctness of Ngugi's decision. Very often, groups of people pooled money together to pay for the beer of a professional reader to listen to excerpts from *Devil on the Cross* in restaurants and beer-bars. Publication of novels like *My Son's Story* by Nadine Gordimer, *Matigari* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *Patriots* by Sousa Jamba, an Angolan writing originally in English and copious references made to various political movements and real episodes in these novels shows that literature still continues to be closely aligned to politics in Africa. And it has not always been an alliance on behalf of the people as is the case with Souse Jamba's *Patriots* where the author is clearly on the side of the UNITA, considering it to be a more democratic front. However, by the time the novel was published, events in Angola had proved his partisan stand to be wrong.

This relationship between literature and politics has, however, not been a one-sided affair. It is not only politics as fiction—not always. It has also been the other way round—at least sometimes. How else does one explain the convulsions of a fictional

coup—in *A Man of the People*—leading to a real one or a fictional hero—Matigari in *Matigari*—scaring an oppressive regime so much as to invite an arrest warrant against himself. In Africa, it is not only novelists who have led the politics of their respective countries as was the case with Abubaker Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria but it is also the novel itself which had led politics sometimes—literally—as was the case with both *A Man of the People* and *Matigari.*

3.6.6 Fiction by African Women

The most powerful political statements about women have, however, been made by women novelists themselves. More and more women in Africa have been taking to writing – novel writing in particular—and we do know that the very act of writing is a political act for women. Grace Ogot from Kenya in her *The Promised Land*, Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria in her *The Joys of Motherhood, Destination Biafra* and *Second Class Citizen*, Flora Nwapa from Nigeria in her *Women are Different*, Rebecca Njau from Kenya in her *Ripples in the Pool*, Mariama Ba from Senegal in her *Scarlet Song*, Bessie Head from South Africa/Botswana in her *Maru* and *The Collector of Treasures*, Farida Karodia also from South Africa in her *Coming Home* and Nadine Gordimer in her novel *My Son's Story* and numerous short stories—have all made women a significant part of the political agenda of African novelists. But it would be unfair to the women novelists from Africa if we attempted to state that their themes are restricted to the problems of women alone, for they have not only raised other problems confronting the African people at large but have been focussing on women only in the overall context of colonialism and its aftermath namely neo-colonialism in Africa.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have learnt about the development of the novel in Africa. Beginning with the pre-colonial tradition of oral narratives, the novel in Africa developed as a hybrid under the influence of western novel writing and the Bible, both of which were introduced on the African soil after the continent's encounter with Europe. The African novel, from the very beginning, had overt socio-political goals, namely, of countering the western propaganda that African societies were primitive, savage, devoid of any cultural and historical developments. Therefore, the novel in Africa—together with other genres of writing—played a crucial role in decolonizing the minds of Africans. Contemporary novel writing in Africa is highlighting the socio-political problems faced by the people of many post-colonial nations in Africa.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. What was the nature of oral narratives in Africa? Discuss.

2. Discuss in details the circumstances leading to the transplantation on the African soil of the genre of western novel.

3. What were the major influences on the African novel in its initial phase of development?

4. Why did Achebe choose "encounter with Europe" as the theme of his first novel—*Things Fall Apart?*

5. How and under what circumstances did Ngugi wa Thiong'o shift the themes of his books from that of "encounter" to "conflict"?

6. Write a detailed note on the fiction writing by African women.

7. Why do recent developments in African fiction show a trend towards writing a more radical political novel?

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4 NGUGI WA THIONG'O—LIFE, LITERATURE AND IDEOLOGY

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Birth and Early Education
4.2 Higher Education
  4.2.1 Makerere University College Uganda
  4.2.2 Leeds University, United Kingdom
4.3 Teaching Career
  4.3.1 Nairobi University
  4.3.2 Teaching in the U.S.A.
4.4 Detention and Exile
4.5 Ideology
4.6 Let Us Sum Up
4.7 Questions
4.8 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

One of the objectives of this Unit is to provide details of the life of Ngugi wa Thiong'o including his educational background. However, the main focus of the unit is on his writings—the time and the place where various books were conceived, written and published. The Unit also highlights various events in his life that have had a direct impact on his writing career. Finally, Ngugi's views about language, literature, education, religion and their impact on society—both during colonial rule and in the post-colonial situation are discussed in detail at the end of this unit since these have a bearing on his creative writing. In fact, these views constitute his ideological standpoint—his very world view.

4.1 BIRTH AND EARLY EDUCATION

Born in 1938, in the family of a landless squatter on the land of a well-to-do farmer in the Kamiithu village in Limuru district of Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o went to the mission-run Kamaandura school in Limuru and later to a school of the Independent Schools Movement. Later, he joined the Alliance High School—Kenya's first full-fledged school for Africans—run by an alliance of the Protestant denominations in Kenya. It is here that Ngugi's religious awareness about Christianity—a fact which is more than obvious from his writings, particularly in *A Grain of Wheat* where copious references were made to the Bible—was formed.

Ngugi was fourteen when a state of Emergency was declared in Kenya in 1952—on October 20, 1952, to be precise. His passion for education seems to have weighed heavily with him in his decision to continue with it and as a result he missed out on actual participation in the movement. This fact seems to have given him a kind of guilt complex and is perhaps one of the major reasons for making the freedom struggle, particularly the "Mau Mau' phase, repeatedly the theme of most of his books.

4.2 HIGHER EDUCATION

4.2.1 Makerere University College Uganda

After finishing his schoo. education at Alliance High School, Ngugi joined B.A.(Hons) in English at the Makerere University College, at Kampala, Uganda, which was the only university college in the whole of East Africa. It is here that his creative talents developed. Before graduating in 1963, Ngugi had written his first full length play—*The Black Hermit*—which was performed on the occasion of the Independence of Uganda in 1962. He had also written his first two novels—*The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child.* During this period he also became the student editor of *Pen Point* and wrote a number of short stories as well. During the same period he also contributed a regular column—**As I see It**—to the *Daily Nation*, a prominent newspaper published from Nairobi.

It was a conventional co urse in English literature that Ngugi pursued at Mekerere and some critics are of the opinion that the study of D.H.Lawrence and Joseph Conrad left an early influence on his writings.

4.2.2 Leeds University, United Kingdom

Leeds was Ngugi's next halt for education. Here he soon became a part of Arnold Kettle's group that provided him with new perspectives on various issues—political, social, cultural and academic. In his own words—"Leeds systematised my thinking." At Leeds, he started working on Caribbean literature as his dissertation for the M.A., degree—a work that he never submitted and that was later to be published as a part of his first book of essays—*Homecoming*—in 1972. Leeds also provided him with an opportunity to participate in a number of conferences in Syria, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. But what is really significant about his staying in Leeds is that it is here that he published his next novel—*A Grain of Wheat*—in 1967.

4.3 TEACHING CAREER

4.3.1 Nairobi University

Returning home the same year, Ngugi became a lecturer at the English department of Nairobi University. Soon he suggested a number of radical changes in the syllabus, recommending, among others, incorporation of literatures written in African languages as a part of the Programme. These were, however, not accepted. Ngugi resigned from his position in 1969, due to the stiff attitude of the university authorities against students who had been forced to go on a strike for raising various demands.

Back to Makerere where he had accepted a year's fellowship, Ngugi wa Thiong'o helped the institution reorganize its English department as the African Literature Department with special focus on world literatures rather than on English literature alone. This was very much in keeping with his recommendations at the English department in Nairobi University.

4.3.2 Teaching in the U.S.A.

Ngugi went to the U.S.A. for a year to teach African literature at North Western University, Illinois, where he got an opportunity to observe, as he put it in *The Trial*

of Dedan Kimathi. "Neo-imperialism at close quarters." He was back at the English department in Nairobi University in 1971 where he was able to bring about the desired changes and the department was organized as Department of Literature. The period between 1972 and 1977 proved very fruitful in Ngugi's literary career. He published a number of books, beginning with *Homecoming and Other Essays*(1972), *Secret Lives* (1975) a collection of stories,*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*(1976), which he wrote together with his colleague Micere Mugo. *Petals of Blood*(1977), his next novel, was also published during this period.

4.4 DETENTION AND EXILE

Ngugi got into trouble with government authorities in Kenya over portions of his *Petals of Blood* in which he dealt for the first time in his writings, situations in post-independence Kenya. Also the text of a play—*Ngaahika Ndeenda*(*I will Marry when I want*)—about peasants in independent Kenya which he wrote together with Ngugi wa Miiri in his mother tongue Gikuyu and which was performed at the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre, Limuru in 1977, was objected to by the authorities who eventually banned its performances on November 16, 1977. On 31st December, 1977, Ngugi was taken to a police station near his residence for "routine questioning" but was detained without trial for almost a year—until December 12, 1978 to be precise. He was released as unexplicably as he had been detained. However, he was not restored to his position as Professor and Head of the Department of Literature, Nairobi University despite repeated requests.

During his detention, Ngugi wrote down on pieces of toilet paper—literally—the details of his routine as a detainee as also the strategies through which he was to keep his sanity alive in the face of humiliations and torture—both physical and mental. This was later published as *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* in 1981. During this period, he also wrote the manuscript of his next novel—*Caithni Mutharaba Ini* (*Devil on the Cross*)—in Gikuyu. Ngugi, let us recall, had made his first attempt at writing in his mother tongue Gikuyu as a conscious decision when he had collaborated with Ngugi wa Miiri, in writing a play which was published as *Ngaahika Ndeenda*(*I will Marry when I want*) in 1980.

His request for the restoration of his position as Professor at the Nairobi University having been turned down, Ngugi wa Thiong'o went away to English, settling down as a fulltime writer. It is from here that a number of his books—*Writers in Politics*, *Barrel of a Pen*, *Decolonizing the Mind*, *Mother sing to Me*, *Moving the Centre* and his latest novel *Matigari*—were published. He has also made common cause with all those who were fighting for he restoration of democracy in Kenya. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has since shifted to the U.S.A. where he teaches in a college in New York

4.5 IDEOLOGY

Ngugi wa Thiong'o believes that literature and politics are inextricably linked with each other because both are about "living men, actual men and women and children, breathing, eating, crying, laughing, creating, dying, flowering men in history of which they are the product and the maker."

Therefore, he chose as the subject of his writings that single event in the history of Kenya that has affected its people the most, namely, the most crucial phase of their struggle for freedom—the so called Mau Mau. Ngugi believes—together with many other African writers—that the primary aim of literature is not merely to entertain but also to persuade Ngugi, therefore, does not confine himself to mere chronicling of

factual details of historical events, but he also takes a certain partisan attitude towards them. In his own words.

> What is important....is the attitude and the world view embodied in his work and with which he is persuaded us to identify vis-à-vis the historical drama his community is undergoing.(*Writers in Politics, p.* 75)

It is because of this historic responsibility, which he believes, lies on the shoulders of a writer that Ngugi makes known his partisanship; while portraying the basic opposition between the forces of imperialism and capitalism on one hand and the forces of national liberation and socialism on the other, between a small class of "haves" backed by transnational monopoly capital and the "have nots" representing the masses of Kenyan people. Ngugi, therefore, has refused to confine his portrayal of the national struggle—as has been the case with many other African writers portraying similar struggles in their respective countries—as a struggle of the black against the white. Once again, unlike his other fellow African counterparts, Ngugi is very forthright—particularly in his later novels and plays—in advocating socialism not only as a viable but the most desirable political system of governance for solving the problems of newly liberated African nations reeling under the covert attack of neo-colonialism.

He is also critical of those writers who seek a solution to all their present, post-colonial ills by suggesting to go back to the past, by making an appeal for adopting the African past completely and uncritically. He suggests—quite candidly—a class approach to these problems and their solutions:

> ...for as long as there are classes—classes defined by where or how the various people stand in relation to the means of production—a truly human contact in love, joy, laughter, creative fulfilment in labour will never be possible. We can talk meaningfully of class love, class joy, class marriage, class family and class culture.---- (*Writers in Politics, p.* 79)

Ngugi is therefore quite wary of those writers who talk of humanism, universalism, justice and peace in abstract terms. In this respect he reserves his worst criticism for a section of the bourgeoisie that may be characterized as comprador bourgeoisie—the class of people that collaborated with the ruling colonial forces during the phase of colonialism, particularly during the crucial phase of the national freedom struggle and which wormed itself into positions of political power during the post –independence phase in order to subserve the interests of neo-colonialism and imperialism via the transnationals. The colonial administration-appointed home guards and village chiefs were the most prominent representatives of this class of comprador bourgeoisie.

While tracing the origin of the colonial process in capturing the economic resources of Kenya, particularly the illegal misappropriation of its fertile land—white high lands, as these were called—Ngugi does not overlook another important fact namely what he calls a "cultural bomb." Culture for Ngugi includes the sum total of all the intellectual, moral, ideological forces that give the social relations of production—what we call society—a unique character, a distinctive mark, a certain identity in a particular historical phase. Culture, therefore, includes for Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the education system, the legal system, the religious system, language, literature, forms of dances and songs. Of these the two most significant instruments of cultural imperialism were the church and western system of education, both of which subserved the interests of colonialism. It is because of this that these two underlie the themes of almost all his creative writing including *A Grain of Wheat* wherein he exposed the collaborative role of Christianity most forcefully through the character of Kihika, a revolutionary in the struggle for national freedom.

The other major component of the British colonial cultural bomb in Kenya has been education—the western system of education. Once again, the western system of education which, like Christianity, had been first introduced by the missionaries as a part of the church activitives to lure and beguile the gullible, had the same twin

objectives of disrupting the traditional way of life in Kenya and to create a class of obedient Kenyans who, mouthing cliches and phrases from English language, expressed their allegiance openly to the power of colonialism. No wonder this class receieved a big patronage from the colonial administration through nominations as village chiefs and employment in the home guards system, both of which played a very nefarious role of collaborating saboteurs during the height of Emergency between 1952 and 1957. Karanja in *A Grain of Wheat* is Ngugi's most powerful portrayal of such collaborators.

In fact, this class of comprador bourgeoisie became the subject of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* wherein he has shown this class to be essentially a parasitic class with an incruable wish for permanent identification with the culture of imperialist bourgeoisie. They are the ones who promote prostitution, alcoholism and gambling by setting up massage parlours, beer-bars and casinos in the name of encouraging tourism and effecting 'development' of Kenya, particularly the rural areas.

Ngugi, however, is not satisfied by mere portrayal of the socio-political-cultural situation in Kenya during and after the national struggle for independence. He suggests, in a book of the same title, "decolonizing the mind." By this he means a kind of "dialectical negation of the colonial process," dismantling , as it were, of the various psychological structures that had been in the minds of men as a result of sustained colonial propaganda, covert as well as overt, during the period of colonization. In his book *Writers in Politics*, he suggests to the writers and intellectuals the task of 'going back to the roots' with the aim of restroring the African personality to its true creative potentials in history, so as to enhance the quality of life. To teachers and educational institutions he exhorts to emphasise African languages and literature while pleading with African writers to write in their own languages rather than in European languages.

Ngugi then goes on to define the function of literature in society:

> Literature does not grow or develop in a vaccum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations. Slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. (*Home Coming, p.xv*)

Based on this, Ngugi differentiates the social role of a contemporary artist in Africa from that of one in Europe:

> There was never, in any African society, the cult of the artist with its bohemian priests along with the banks of Seine and Thames. Today, the artist in Europe sees himself as an outsider, living in a kind of individual culture and obeying only the laws of his imagination. (*Home Coming, p.* 6)

It is for similar reasons that Ngugi advocates the use of African languages as the vehicle for the writings by Africans. For many years, he observes, members of the petty bourgeoisie class comprising students, teachers, journalists and bureaucrats continued to compose what Ngugi calls "Afro-European literature" in the languages of Europe, for a readership that also came from the same class. It meant that the moment of truth for Ngugi had arrived. He had to link up his struggle through creative literature with the struggle of the Kenyan masses—now pitted against the comprdor bourgeoisie that had usurped power in Kenya and was clinging to it. Thus, in a statement prefixed to *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi declared that—

> This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way. (*Preface, p.* xiv)

It is therefore not at all surprising that Ngugi assigned a very radical role to a writer in a society, particularly in a society based on sharp class distinctions:

> ...literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battlefield: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics.... *(Writers in Politics, Preface)*

It is on this very powerful statement about the ideological obligations of a writer that we would like to end this discussion about Ngugi's world-view.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have learnt about the life and works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. We have learnt about the early influences on his writings.We have also discussed Ngugi's decision to shift from English to Gikuyu as the medium of his writings. Finally—and most significantly—we have discussed in the last part of this Unit his views about language, literature, education, religion and the impact of all this on writers in post-colonial societies. This is what constitutes his ideological standpoint—his very world-view.

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. Why did Ngugi wa Thiong'o write repeatedly about the theme of Mau Mau? Discuss.
2. Discuss Ngugi's views about the British colonial rule in Kenya as depicted in his writings.
3. Why did Ngugi decide to shift from English to Gikuyu as the medium of his writings?
4. What are Ngugi's views about the role of writer in society? Discuss.
5. Discuss Ngugi's formulations about the comprador bourgeois class in a neo-colonial society.

4.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 5 *A GRAIN OF WHEAT* – SUMMARY

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Summary – Chapters 1, 2, and 3
5.2 Summary—Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8
5.3 Summary—Chapters 9, 10,11, 12 and 13
5.4 Summary—Chapters 14, Karanja, Mugo, Warui,Wambui , and Harambee
5.5 Let Us Sum Up

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Unit is to provide a chapter-by-chapter summary of *A Grain of Wheat*, focussing not only on the story-line but also on the theme, major events and main characters. While doing so, relevant quotations from the text have been reproduced with the intention of drawing the attention of the students to their significance in the study of the novel.

Since Ngugi had divided his novel in different sections—not formally but by separating them with a quotation—we have also clubbed the summaries of the chapters accordingly into different sections.

The objective of this Unit is to whet the appetite of the students to read the text in original and not make do with the summary provided here. Let me repeat that the summary is not a substitute for the text. Please read the text attentively, making notes as you go along.

5.1 SUMMARY—CHAPTERS 1, 2 AND 3

1

The novel begins with Mugo getting out of his bed in the morning to go to his *shamba*—a small piece of land for cultivation. This was a routine that he had followed since his coming out of the detention camp. As he walked through the village—Thabai—on this particular day, he met a number of people who, like him, had suffered during the Emergency. For instance, Warui, a village elder, whom Mugo met en-route to his *shamba*, had lost his piece of land through confiscation while he was under detention. The basic character of Thabai had remained the same since its founding in 1955. Mugo next ran into Githua who was dressed in tatters and who we are told has sustained bullet wounds at the hands of whitemen during the freedom struggle and had as a result become a little soft in the head. Mugo felt uneasy on meeting him on this particular day, particularly after he saw children making fun of him.

Mugo suddenly recalled the old woman who lived at the end of the main street of the village—the woman who had a grown up son—Gitogo—who was deaf and dumb. Gitogo 'worked in eating houses, meat shops, lifting and carrying heavy loads' thereby supporting his old mother. Mugo recalled how during one of the police raids for screening of villagers during the Emergency, Gitogo had been shot dead by soldiers in cold blood while he was running away—out of fright—on seeing the policemen. The official version had been—'Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead'. The old woman they said had refused to grieve her son's death and her eyes

had haunted Mugo ever since. In her presence, he had 'always felt naked, seen'. On this particular day, Mugo felt like entering the hut of the woman and talking to her but his courage failed him and he continued on to his field.

Soon Mugo was at his *shamba*, working, but he felt that the soil was 'dry and hollow and he realised that the soil did not 'fascinate' him as much as it did before the Emergency. Ruminating over his past, Mugo recalled how his parents had died when he was quite young and he had been brought up by an aunt—Waitherero—who was also drunk and who abused him so much that Mugo wanted to kill her. After his aunt had died of 'age and over-drinking', Mugo took to working on the *shamba*, dreaming of a peaceful, prosperous life.

'But then Kihika had come into his life'...

Mugo did not linger much longer in the field and went home early, walking 'like a man who knows he is followed or watched, yet does not want to reveal this awareness by his gait or behaviour'. In the evening he was surprised by the visit of a group of people from the village, led by Warui, the village elder. He was accompanied by Wambui and Gikonyo,who had married Kihika's sister. After welcoming them into his hut, Mugo's first instinct was to run away from them.

'We are only voiced sent to you from the Party', said Gikonyo and others agreed with him. Mugo asked, intrigued—'The Party?'—and they repeated—'Yes...mere voices from the Party'.

2

The mention of the word 'Party' in the previous chapter provides the author with an opportunity to intervene and trace, in this chapter, the history of Kenya from the time when the first missionaries arrived to the present, when Kenya is about to gain indepence from the colonial British who had followed on the heels of the missionaries.

The Party was an entity whose existence had been taken for granted, particularly by the younger generation for whom it was a 'rallying centre for action'. On 'the eve of Uhuru, its influence stretched from one horizon touching the sea to the other resting on the great lake.' Its origin, Ngugi suggests, could be 'traced to the day the whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that the whiteman was a messenger from the Lord.' Ngugi then goes on to trace the history of the entrenchment of missionaries among them who told them of a woman ruler in a far off land. The reference to a woman ruler gives Ngugi a chance to recall a bygone era when the Gikuyu were ruled by women. He remembers particularly one beautiful woman ruler—Wangu Makeri—who lost her throne because of overreaching herself and dancing naked in public.

Ngugi then goes on to dilate on the strategy employed by the missionaries, first, in converting the Africans into christianity and later in helping the colonising British in overpowering them:

> They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible but the sword.' (p.12)

Soon the resistance offered by Waiyaki and others was overcome with Waiyaki himself being buried alive by the colonisers. Ngugi suggests that Waiyaki's blood contained 'within it a seed, a grain which gave birth to a political party whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil.'(p.13)

Harry Thuku then became their leader, their Moses, who asked them 'to join the Party and find strength in unity'. People followed Harry's advice and 'waited for something to happen. The revolt of the peasant was at hand.'

The whiteman clamped Harry into chains and put him in jail which made the people only more determined and they held a major demonstration in Nairobi demanding Young Harry's release. Waiyaki, then a young man, had walked all the way from Thabai to Nairobi to join the procession. In 1953, when Jomo Kenyatta was arrested by the whiteman, Waiyaki recalled the 1923 procession for Harry Thuku:

> We came from ridges here, ridges there, everywhere. Most of us walked. Others did not bring food. We shared whatever crumbs we had brought. Great love I saw there. A bean fell to the ground, and it was quickly split among the children. For three days we gathered in Nairobi with our blood we wrote vows to free Harry.(pp.13-14)

In the firing by the soldiers on the processionists, fifteen Africans died. Waiyaki's regret was—'Perhaps if we had the spears...' The movement failed and 'the man with the flaming eyes came to the scene'—one who came to be known later as 'the burning spear'.

Mugo recalled, he had once attended a meeting of the Party at Rung'ei Market. Gikonyo was there and so was Mumbi, said to be one of the most beautiful women on all the eight ridges. Sometimes she was compared with Wangu Makeri. Kihika from Thabai, Mumbi's brother, was one of the speakers who received a big ovation from the crowds when he said—'This is not 1920. What we now want is action, a blow which will tell'. Kihika summed up the great betrayal by the whiteman in the following words:

> We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said: Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said: Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth.(p.15)

Kihika had spoken of blood and Mugo had hated him for his arrogance. Also he had felt a twang of jealousy as he had seen everyone look at the speaker with admiration.

After the 1952 arrest of Jomo Kenyatta and others, Kihika had disappeared into the forest , later to be followed by a handful of young men from Thabai and Rung'ei. Kihika had raided the transit prisoner's camp of Mahee, carrying fresh supplies of men, guns and ammunition to continue on a scale unheard of in the days of Waiyaki and young Harry.

A year later Kihika was arrested, tortured and 'hanged in public', one Sunday at Rung'ei Market, 'not far from where he had once stood calling for blood to rain on and water the tree of freedom.'

The Party had, however, remained alive even after Kihika's death, growing, as people put it, on the wounds of those Kihika left behind.

3

The narrative reverts back to the delegation sitting in Mugo's hut. We now understand that they had come to persuade Mugo to lead the Uhuru—Independence—celebrations. Gikonyo, Ngugi tells us had worked hard to become 'one of the richest men in Thabai', four years after returning home from detention.

Warui, the second person in the delegation to Mugo's house, was the seniormost of the villagers whose 'life was, in a way, the story of the Party; he had taken part in the meetings of Young Harry, had helped in building people's own schools and listened to Jomo's speeches in the 'twenties.' The third person in the delegation was Wambui, a woman who 'carried secrets from the villages to the forest and back to the villages and towns' during the Emergency. Sitting there, talking about the celebrations for the Uhuru, they observe that they cannot forget their sons who sacrificed their lives for freedom. 'And Kihika was such a man, a great man.' Before Mugo reacts to their proposal, they are joined by two more persons—Lieutenant Koinandu and General R—both of whom were in the forest with Kihika. Sitting there all of them—except Mugo—reminisce about Kihika. General R, in fact, brings out the Bible which Kihika always carried on his person, except that he did not carry it with him on his last mission when he was captured—betrayed as General R says. Observing that Mugo was the last man who had given Kihika shelter a week before his capture, both Koinandu and General enquire from him whether Kihika had mentioned the name of the person he was going to see the week after. Mugo denies any knowledge, saying that Kihika did not mention the name of Karanja even, whom all suspect to be the betrayer of Kihika.

Asking Mugo to give them an answer about leading the celebrations soon since December 12—the day of the Uhuru—only four days away, the members of the delegation leave.

Back in their hut, both Lieutenant Koinandu and General R go over the circumstances under which Kihika had been captured and express their resolve to find the traitor who had betrayed Kihika. Warui and Wambui, on their part, wonder about the strange behaviour of Mugo who had shown no enthusiasm for the celebrations. They also recall that during the detention while he had been beaten very badly by the authorities, he had refused to confess that he had given shelter to Kihika.

On his way home, Gikonyo focusses on his personal life, particularly the chasm that had come between him and his wife Mumbi—Kihika's sister—since his return home from detention. While we are given a glimpse of it when Gikonyo—back home—refuses to eat food, we are not made privy to the reasons behind this tension between the two. It is on this note that the chapter ends.

5.2 SUMMARY—CHAPTERS 4, 5, 6, 7 AND 8

4

Ngugi now shifts the focus to Githima—Githima Forestry and Agriculture Research Station—where the thoughts of Europeans as well the African employees are focussed on the forthcoming Uhuru and the changes it is likely to bring in their lives—both personal and professional. It is also an occasion for some of them to review their past in Kenya.

Karanja, for instance, is apprehensive about the rumour that the Europeans working in the Research Station were about to leave for home for good. This would affect his own status in a big way since he derived all his power over fellow Africans from his so-called proximity to the white masters, particularly John Thompson, the Administrative Secretary. Already, Karanja feels that his fellow Africans are defying him, answering back to him and are showing signs of not being scared of him.

John Thompson, on the other hand, is worried about the Research Station going to the dogs once the Europeans leave :

> Would these things remain after Thursday? Perhaps for two months: and then—test-tubes and beakers would be broken or lie unwashed on the

> cement, the hot-house and seed beds strewn with wild plants and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed, would gradually creep into a litter-filled compound.(p.38)

John Thompson also senses a sense of defiance and open hostility among his African employees—with the exception of Karanja, of course, who was simply servile in their presence even now. The way the employees had talked back to Dr. Lynd whose dog had charged them, makes.Thompson recall the incident at Rira detention Camp where he was once the Commanding Officer. His detainees had gone on a strike, refusing even food. When he had ordered their beating in order to break their defiance, as many as eleven had died and then his name had been bandied about even in the British Parliament.

Dr. Lynd, a research officer, recalls the unfortunate incident during the Emergency when three Africans including her houseboy had raped her when she was staying at Muguga. Apparently, she had become the victim of the Africans' hatred towards the white people since, as she herself puts it, 'she had never harmed anybody.'

On the eve of Uhuru and their departure back home, Thompson's wife, Margery, recalls the period of their stay in Kenya as one in which personal relations between her husband and herself had come under a lot of strain, thanks to John's preoccupation with official work. Stressed after the Rira disaster, she had sought solace in the arms of Dr. Van Dyke, by letting him 'make love to her' and had experienced, 'for the first time, the terrible beauty of a rebellion.' On this particular day, when Karaja comes home to deliver to her a message from her husband, she feels a similar sensual urge towards him but Karanja, for whom a cup of coffee offered by the white Memsahib was more than what he could hope for, had refused to pick up the hints which had left her feeling both frustrated and miserable.

5

Thompson continues to ruminate over the prospects of the Research Station under his successor, worrying about the place falling apart after his departure while in fact what pained him was the realization that he was not indispensable. He tries to transfer his frustration to his wife and wants to ask her if in case of his death would she consider marrying another man but he lacks the courage to confront his wife with such a question.

At the same time, his wife, Margery, too is preoccupied with her thoughts. She remembers the kind of life they had led after coming to Kenya which had taken her husband away from her. Also she is depressed about leaving her home at Githima:

> Would she never, never see Githima again? Would her flowers mean anything to whoever would take her place in this house? Every corner of the house, the chairs, the table and even the walls held a memory for her ; in her wanderings from district to district all over Kenya, no other house, no other place was so intimately bound up with her. No other place had given such a sense of relief, of freedom, of power. (p.44)

It was in Githima that she had met Dr. Van Dyke with whom she had carried on an affair despite the fact that she did not like his uncouth behaviour. However, on the eve of Uhuru which had created a new crisis in their lives, she wanted Thompson and her to renew this dialogue, their sharing of anxities and fears with each other.

The author also takes this opportunity to narrate in his own voice, the story of John Thompson's coming to East Africa riding high on the colonial morals of serving humanity through the development of the native Africans. From the first day of his arrival he had treated his work as a mission and had decided to write a book about it which he had titled as *Prospero in Africa.* Towards this end, he had been keeping

notes of his work in a notebook. The author lets us have a peep into the notebook which reveals a typical colonial mindset. Among the notes are his observations on the Mau Mau which he considers to be 'evil: a movement which if not checked will mean complete destruction of all the values on which our civilization has thriven.'(p.49)

6

Ngugi now focusses on the life of Gikonyo, who, he tells us was 'among the first of detainees to pass through the pipe-line back to the village. He set himself up as a carpenter, worked hard, refused to give indefinite credit and built himself a good reputation. Simultaneously, he got into retailing food grains by buying immediately after the harves when the prices were low and selling when the stocks in the market were low. His wife and his mother helped him in his business and soon he prospered.

The chapter also gives Ngugi an opportunity to dilate on the life of an M.P. since Gikonyo visits the M.P. of his area to get a recommendation for a loan from a bank for buying a piece of land. He is quite amused at the mannerisms of the M.P. including the way he dressed, which was a blind aping of their white masters. In fact, the M.P. also spoke like the whiteman, holding no promise for help.

In the meanwhile, people began to speak about the courage shown and sacrifices made by Mugo, who was quite upset by their proposal asking him to lead the celebrations:

> Why did they want him to lead the Uhuru celebrations? Why not Gikonyo, Warui, or one of the forest fighters? Why Mugo? Why? Why? (*p.* 56)

Mugo had made only one real speech in his life. It was about the demand by the Party for Kenyatta's release from detention. Mugo spoke of the injustice of the whiteman in arresting him:

> They took us to the roads and to the quarries even those who had never done anything. They called us criminals But not because we had stolen anything or killed anyone. We had only asked for the thing that belonged to us from the time of Agu and Agu. Day and night, they made us dig. We were stricken ill, we often slept with empty stomachs, and our clothes were just rags and tatters so that the rain and the wind and the sun knew our nakedness. In those days we did not stay alive because we thought our cause strong. It was not even because we loved the country. If that had been all, who would not have perished? (*p.* 58)

Although Mugo became a recluse thereafter, people had spoken of his powerful speech for a long time.

This time, however, he was apprehensive too. Why had, he wondered, General R. 'asked those pointed questions. Meeting somebody after a week? Karanja? Yes, could they have really asked him to carve his place in society by singing tributes to the man he had so treacherously betrayed?'(p.59)

He is visited by Gikonyo who reminds him of the hunger strike at Rira and Mugo remembered vividly the Rira detention camp and the beating he had received at the hands of Thompson. While he comments that 'the government says we should bury the past', Gikonyo says that he cannot. He also tells him that he had confessed his oath while he—Mugo—had not and that's why they admired him all the more. He also observes that those who had made no sacrifices for freedom were enjoying its fruits while true patriots like Mugo were suffering.

Mugo consoles Gikonyo by saying that his confession was understandable since he wanted to be united with his wife Mumbi. While agreeing with Mugo that he loved

Mumbi very much and wanted to be united with her, Gikonyo remarks that everything had changed—even Mumbi:

> 'She too had changed,' Gikonyo said, almost in a whisper.
> 'God, where is the Mumbi I left behind.'(p.61)

7

Chapter seven begins with Ngugi tracing the history of the Thabai ridge which had developed as a market for the area where even some Indians had set up shops. More Indians had come from Nairobi, bought grains and vegetables and sold them at a higher price in the city. The passing of the railway line from near Thabai had helped in all this. Ngugi, in his authorial voice, recalls the early days when the railway line—the Iron snake—had reached Thabai, people had run away considering the snake to be harmful.

> Later the railway platform became the meeting place for the young. They talked in groups at home, the went for walks in the county, some even went to church; but in their minds was always the train on Sunday. On Sunday afternoon, the passenger train to Kampala and the one to Mombasa met at Rung'ei station. People did not go there, as it might be thought, to meet friends arriving from Mombasa, Kisumu and Kampala—they just went there to meet one another, to talk, to gossip, to laugh.
>
> Love affairs were often hatched there; many marriages with their attendant cry of woe or joy had their origin at the station platform...
>
> The train became an obsession: if you missed it, sorrow seized your heart for the rest of the week; you longed for the next train. Then Sunday came, you went there on time, and immediately you were healed. (*p.* 63)

Resuming his story, Gikonyo tells Mugo that he rarely missed the train and –

'Yet the day I missed the train was the happiest in my life'.(p.64)

Gikonyo, an outsider settled in Thabai, had become an adept carpenter, thanks to his mother Wangari who encouraged him to learn the trade. Gikonyo had come to admire Mumbi, a beautiful girl of the area whose father Mbugua was a village elder. While Gikonyo admired Mumbi quietly, it was Karanja, another youth from the village who amused all—including Mumbi— by his funny manner of telling stories and episodes. One day, Mumbi had asked Gikonyo to play the guitar for her and she had sung along. Thereafter, she felt very peaceful. On another she came to him to have the handle of her panga fixed by him and admired his skills. She teased him in her youthful ways when Gikonyo came to return the repaired panga. This way intimacy between the two grew.

On a particular Sunday, when they—Mumbi, Karanja, Gikonyo and others—were running to catch a glimpse of the train, Mumbi drew him back and they went to a wood en route. There he made love to her:

> She lay against his breast, their heart-beat each to each. It was all quiet. Mumbi was trembling, and this sent a quiver of fear and joy trilling in his blood. Gradually, he pulled her to the ground, the long grass covered them. Mumbi breathed hard, but could not, dare not, speak. One by one, Gikonyo removed her clothes as if performing a dark ritual in the wood. Now her body gleamed in the sun. Her eyes were soft and wild and submissive and defiant. Gikonyo passed his hands through her hair and over her breasts, slowly coaxing and smoothing stiffness from her body, until she lay limp in his hands. Suddenly, Gikonyo found himself suspended in a void, he was near

> breaking point and as he swooned into the dark depth he heard a moan escape Mumbi's parted lips. She held him tight to herself.Their breath was now one.The earth moved beneath their one body into a stillness.(p.80)

Karanja had thus lost Mumbi to Gikonyo and he now hated not only both of them but also her brother Kihika who had by now become an outstanding orator, speaking of the usurpation of their land by the whiteman and was thinking of himself as 'a saint, leading the Gikuyu people to freedom and power.' (p.73)

Kihika had earlier left the Mahiga mission school on contradicting his teacher who had called circumcision of women a heathen custom. He had then gone to work in Nairobi, attended political meetings and discovered the Party. "He had found a new vision." (*pp*.76-77)

In his speeches, Kihika often referred to the example of India that had shown a rare unity in fighting the British:

> The example of India is there before our noses. The British were there for hundreds and hundreds of years. They ate India's wealth. They drank India's blood. They never listened to the political talk-talk of a few men. What happened? There came this man Gandhi. Mark you, Gandhi knows his whiteman well. He goes round and organizes the Indian masses into a weapon stronger than the bomb...Do you know why Gandhi succeeded? Because he made his people give up their fathers and mothers and serve their one mother –India. With us Kenya is our mother .'(pp.77-78)

Later they all—Karanja, Kihikaa, Wambuku and others went to the forest, where Kihika again spoke of freeing Kenyan land from the clutches of the British:

> 'My father's ten acres? That is not the important thing. Kenya belongs to black people. Can't you see that Cain was wrong? I am my brother's keeper. In any case, whether the land was stolen from Gikuyu, Ubabi or Nandi, it does not belong to the whiteman. And even if did, shouldn't everybody have a share in the common shamba, our Kenya? Take your whiteman, anywhere, in the settled area. He owns hundreds and hundreds of acres of land. What about the black men who squat there, who sweat dry on the farms to grow coffee, tea, sisal wheat and yet only get ten shillings a month?'(p.85)

All this Gikonyo recalled while sitting with Mugo. He also recalled the day Kihika ran away to the forest 'to fight'. This was after Jomo Kenyatta had been arrested. More men were rounded up. Gikonyo recalled his own detention and release after six years, during which he had aged but he had clung to the dream of being united with his mother Wangari and wife Mumbi. It is this intense desire to be united with Mumbi that had forced him to confess his oath—he did not name anyone of the oath administerers—he had got an early release.

On his return, Gikonyo was shocked to discover that Mumbi had mothered a child while he was in detention. He also discovered that Karanja who had become the village chief, had blackmailed her into this. Gikonyo felt shattered . His dream had soured into an ugly reality. When he went to see Karanja, he played the chief part openly, telling Gikonyo—

> Listen carefully. You have now come back into a normal life in the village. People here obey the law, hear? No meetings at night, no stories about Gandhi and Unity and all that. The whiteman is here to stay.(p.103)

Gikonyo could not believe his eyes:

> ...the man with whom he had taken an oath to fight the whiteman was talking to him about the power of the white people, the man with whom he used to

play the guitar, the man who often came to the workshop for gossip, was now shouting at him.(p.104)

8

However, while narrating that past to Mugo, Gikonyo could not recall clearly the way he lived during those early days after his release. After he had left, Mugo felt that he too should have told Gikonyo something. However, he was apprehensive too—

> Suppose I had told him...suppose I had suddenly told him...Everything would have been all over...all over...the knowledge...the burden...fears...and hopes...(*p.* 107)

His memory was of a particular day in May 1955, after the Emergency had been in force for about two years. A week after that day D.O. Robson had been shot dead and Kihika had come into his life.

Mugo felt like a cup of tea and went to Kabui shops. There, he met Githogo again who reminded him of the excesses of Emergency as also the negligence by their own government of their sacrifices:

> 'The government has forgotten us. We fought for freedom. And yet now!'(p.110)

Mugo suddenly felt like a saviour—saviour of people like Githua, the old woman whose deaf and dumb son Gitogo had been shot dead. He told himself that 'Nobody need ever know about Kihika. To the few, elect of God, the past was forgiven, was made clean by great deeds that saved many. It was so in the time of Jacob and Esau; it was so in the time of Moses.'(p.110)

5.3 SUMMARY—CHAPTERS 9, 10, 11, 12, AND 13

9

This chapter details out the detention of Mugo that began from Thika detention camp and then they—there were others from Embu, Meru and Mwariga—were transferred to Manyani. Thereafter, they were taken to Rira—a desert. John Thompson had been transferred there after his success at Yala. He tempted the detainees to confess their oaths by providing them with better living conditions and promising them reunion with their families. However, he also applied strong arm tactics on the detainees. As for Mugo, Thompson often picked him up for whipping personally but Mugo did not confess his oath. Thus Mugo's prestige rose among his fellow detainees. This gave them also enough courage to demand better facilities, including increased ration, or else, they threatened, they would go on a hunger strike. And then the strike happened. The day and night beating of the detainees in order to break their unity led to the killing of eleven but Mugo had survived the torture.

Reminiscing all this the next day, that is the day after the delegation had visited him, Mugo went to see Gikonyo at his place. There he met Mumbi—Gikonyo's wife and Kihika's sister—who too reminiscenced about those days. She reminded Mugo how they all had dreams. Kihika had dreams of liberting their land from the clutches of the whiteman, Wambuku, Kihika's girl-friend had dreamt of settling down peacefully with Kihika. Njeri, who too had a crush on Kihika, dreamt of fighting by his side from the forests. And then Mumbi told Mugo that she wanted to talk to him about Gikonyo, her husband . To spite her, Mugo told her that Gikonyo had shared his thoughts with him only the previous evening—even about the child she had had in Gikonyo's absence. Mumbi, however, insisted on telling him about her life after

Gikonyo and Mugo and other men had been taken away to detention camps. She told him how the administration had asked them to move to a new village and those refusing had homes destroyed right before their eyes:

> 'Even now, at night, in bed,' she started, 'I remember the red flames. There were two huts. One belonged to my mother, the other was mine. They told us to remove our bedding and clothes and utensils. They splashed some petrol on the grass thatch of my mother's hut. I then idly thought this was unnecessary as the grass was dry. Anyway, they poured petrol on the dry thatch. The sun burnt hot. My mother sat on a stool by the pile of things from our huts and I stood beside her. I had a gikoi on my head. The leader of the homeguards struck a match and threw it at the roof. It did not light, and the others laughed at him. They shouted and encouraged him. One of them tried to take the matches from him to demonstrate how it could be done. It became a game between them. At the fourth or fifth attempt the roof caught fire. Dark and blue smoke tossed from the roof, and the flames leapt to the sky. They went to my hut. I could not bear to see the game repeated, so I shut my eyes. I wanted to scream but I must have lost my voice because no sound left my throat. I suddenly remembered my mother beside me, and I wanted to take her from the scene, to prevent her from seeing it all to the end. For those huts meant much to her because she had built them after Waruhiu, her husband from the Rift Valley, had divorced her from his side. Anyway, she pushed my hands away and she shook her head slightly and she went on staring at the flames. The roofs were cracking. I remember the pain as the cracking noise repeated in my heart. Soon the roofs of the huts fell in, one after the other, with a roar. I heard my mother gasp at the first roar. But she never let her eyes from the sight...something gave way in my heart, something in me cracked when I saw our home fall.'(p.123)

Mumbi told Mugo that she had then, like a man, built her house at the new site. Karanja who had been her friend since childhood and who had helped her once in a while, tried to show his old affection now that Gikonyo was not around—Gikonyo who had beaten Karanja in the race to possess Mumbi. Mumbi however spurned him. as she had done years ago.

And then Kihika was caught and hanged, shattering her parents and herself. It was whispered that Karanja had betrayed him, although Mumbi could not believe it since they had taken the oath together. The trench digging to which women were subjected by the soldiers brought more misery to their lives since it also meant that soldiers picked up women at random at night and took them to their huts to satisfy their lusts. Many had died. Also, there was hardly any food at home and in these circumstances Karanja, who had become a home guard, had brought her some food which she had refused to take. When he came with food, a second time , he said to her—

> "You don't understand. Did you want us all to die in the Forest and in Detention so that the whiteman could live here on this land alone? The whiteman is strong. Don't you ever forget that. I know, because I have tasted his power. Don't you ever deceive yourself that Jomo Kenyatta will ever be released from Lodwar. And bombs are going to be dropped into the forest as the British did in Japan and Malaya. And those in detention will never, never see this land again. No, Mumbi." The coward lived to see mother while the brave was left dead on the battlefield. And to ward off a blow is not cowardice.(p.130)

And again—

> Karanja always pointed out to me that my faithfulness was vain. The government forces were beating the Freedom Fighters. We never got a letter

> or heard a word from those in detention. The radio no longer mentioned them. And with years, Karanja became arrogant towards me.(*p.* 131)

And then one day, out of the blue, he had told her about Gikonyo's return. He even showed her the list and in that moment of weakness she had given herself up to him:

> 'That I remember being full of submissive gratitude? That I laughed—even welcomed Karanja's cold lips on my face? I was in a strange world, and it was like if I was mad. And need I tell you more? I let Karanja make love to me...When I woke and realized fully what had happened, I became cold, the whole body. Karanja tried to say nice things to me, but I could see he was laughing at me with triumph. I took one of his shoes and threw it at him. (pp.131-132)

At this point General R. came to Mumbi's place and joined them in their reminiscences.Soon, however, he was back to his obsession of catching Kihika's betrayer and said that he suspected Karanja to be the man. When he reminded Mugo about the celebrations on Thursday by which time they hoped to catch Kihika's betrayer and asked Mugo to lead them, Mugo refused by saying—

> 'That cannot be,' he said. 'I came here to tell Gikonyo and the Party that I am not a fit man to lead them. The Party should look elsewhere for a leader.'(p.134)

10

Chapter ten focusses on Genral R. and Karanja. To General R. the decision that 'Karanja should die on Independence Day seemed just: that he should be humiliated in front of a huge crowd, if he gave himself up, or else he made uncomfortable, was only a necessary preparation for the ritual.' (p.135)

Ngugi now fills the readers with the details of General R.'s life in his authorial voice, as he has done about other major characters in the novel. Before the war of Independence, General R., we are told, had lived in Rung'ei, working as a tailor. Nobody knew for sure where he came from originally: Nyeri or Embu. They did not even know his real name and called him Ka-40 because once or twice in those few moments of lowered self-defence, he had had said thus:

'See me, a young man of '40. I was born in 1940, circumcised in 1940, went to fight Hitler in 1940, and married in 1940. So me, I am a young man of '40.'(p.135)

While General R. was pronouncing the death sentence on Karanja, Karanja, we are told, was busy trying to find out whether John Thompson was really leaving Kenya. He was obviously very worried because—

> ...to Karanja, John Thompson had always assumed the symbol of whiteman's power, unmovable like a rock, a power that had built the bomb and transformed a country from wild bush and forests into modern cities, with tarmac highways, motor vehicles on two or four legs, railways, trains, aeroplanes and buildings whose towers scraped the sky—and all this in the space of sixty years. Had he himself not experienced that power, which also ruled over the souls of men, when he, as a chief, could make circumcised men cower before him, women scream by the lift of his finger? (*p.* 136)

When Mwaura asked him whether it was true that John Thompson was leaving and that 'an African, a man with a black skin like you or me is coming to replace him' Karanja screamed at him, denying the rumour: 'You may think what you like, but Thompson is not going anywhere.'

However, soon thereafter, when Karanja asked Thompson, in a halting voice about his rumoured departure, John Thompson confirmed his worst fears by answering quickly, 'yes, yes'.

11

Chapter eleven focusses on the farewell of John Thompson and the fears and anxieties lurking in the minds of the white people, bringing a state of uncertainty to the fore in every heart. For instance, the departure of John Thompson was considered a kind of sacrifice being made by the colonial government to appease the Africans—

> What was he going to do? Had he found a job? Wasn't it a shame the way the British government abandoned men she had encouraged and sent abroad? It came from her yielding to African violence and International Communism. Didn't you see what was happening in Uganda and Tanganyika? The Chinese and the Russians had rushed to establish embassies. Mrs. Dickinson, the librarian, was always the more outspoken in politics and predicted a holocaust after Uhuru.(pp.142-143)

Driving back from the party, both John Thompson and his wife Margery are in a sombre mood. Thompson, particularly, is still agitated over the impending loss of all that they, the British, had done for Africa:

> 'Perhaps this is not the journey's end,' he said, at last.
> 'What?'
> 'We are not yet beaten,' he asserted hoarsely. 'Africa cannot, cannot do without Europe.'
> Margery looked up at him, but said nothing. (*p.* 144)

12

This chapter focusses on the relations between Gikonyo and Mumbi which seem to have gone from bad to worse ever since Gikonyo had discovered about Mumbi's child from Karanja. After he came back, Mumbi tried to engage him in a conversation telling him about the visit by Mugo and his refusal to lead the celebrations. Gikonyo was in a foul mood because of his M.P. having double-crossed him in procuring the Green Hill Farm. In this mood, he picked up a quarrel with his wife, hit her and received a dressing down from his mother Wangari who called him a coward who was not ready to know about and face the circumstances under which Mumbi had given in to Karanja. In the meantime, Mumbi had left his place to go back to her parents since she found it difficult to live with Gikonyo anymore.

Gikonyo went to consult with Warui about the forthcoming celebrations and the crisis created by Mugo's refusal to lead the celebrations. He also told Warui about his disappointment over the Green Hill Farm. They decided to go to Mugo's hut once again.

In the meantime, Mugo having returned from Mumbi's place who had reminded him of his heroic deed in saving Wambui from the homeguard's whipping, recalled the whole incident in its entirety:

> The whole scene became alive and vivid. He worked a few yards from the woman. He had worked in the same place for three days. Now a homeguard jumped into the trench and lashed the woman with a whip. Mugo felt the whip eat into his flesh, and her pained whimper was like a cry from his own heart. Yet he did not know her, had for the three days refused to recognize those around him as fellow sufferers. Now he only saw the woman, the whip, and the homeguard. Most people continued digging, pretending not to hear

> the woman's screams, and fearing to meet a similar fate. Others furtively glanced at the woman as they raised their shovels and jembes. In terror, Mugo pushed forward, and held the whip before the homeguard could hit the woman a fifth time. More homeguards and two or three soldiers ran to the scene. Other people temporarily stopped digging and watched the struggle and the whips that now descended on Mugo's body. 'He's mad,' some people later said, after Mugo had been taken away in a police van. To Mugo the scene remained a nightmare whose broken and blurred edges he could not pick or reconstruct during the secret screening that later followed.(p.150)

Mugo's persistent refusal to participate in the Independence Day celebrations, earned him more respect:

> The man who had suffered so much had further revealed his greatness in modesty. By refusing to lead, Mugo had become a legendary hero. (p.153)

13

Chapter thirteen opens with the Thabai women in the Rung'ei market watching with curiousity Mugo shopping around in the rain, on the day before the celebrations. They were proud of him: 'Tonight Kenya would get Uhuru. And Mugo, our village hero, was no ordinary man.'. Wambui went about, asking women to 'force the issue' with Mugo—persuade him to lead the celebrations since 'Mugo was Kihika born again'.(p.156) It was decided to send Mumbi to Mugo. Mumbi, at her parents' place, was however, more worried about what General R. had told her : that Karanja should be killed on the Independence Day.

> Should this be done in the name of her brother?Surely, enough blood had been already shed: why add more guilt to the land? She woke up in the morning with the problem still unresolved.(p.158)

She sent a note to Karanja, asking him not to 'come to the meeting tomorrow.' Having done this and feeling a little relieved, she went to Mugo's place to request him to join 'the meeting tomorrow.' However, Mugo declined the invitation, saying that he did not want to reopen the wounds of the past:

> 'When I was young, I saw the whiteman, I did not know who he was or where he came from Now I know that a Mzungu is not a man—always remember that—he is a devil—devil... I saw a man whose manhood was broken with pincers. He came out of the screening office and fell down and he cried: to know I will never touch my wife again, oh God, can I ever look at her in the eyes after this? For me I only looked into an abyss and deep inside I only saw a darkness I could not penetrate.(p.160)

Mumbi then appealed to him to talk about himself—his experiences. Suddenly Mugo began to act strange, claiming he had strangulated Kihika and now he was going to strangulate her—Mumbi.

Ngugi then uses his authorial voice to recall the events leading to the shooting of D.O. Thomas Robson, who as D.O. of Rung'ei had become a legend among the villagers due to his ruthless terror wherein he'd force innocent people to dig their own graves—literally—and then shoot them into it. In May 1955, Kihika shot him dead and then he sought shelter in Mugo's hut. On being questioned by Mugo about their motivation in shedding blood, Kihika had told him—

> 'We just don't kill anybody... We are not murderers. We are not hangmen—like Robson—killing men and women without cause or purpose...

> We only hit back. You are struck on the left cheek. You turn the right cheek. One, two, three—sixty years. Then suddenly, it is always sudden, you say: I am not turning the other cheek any more...'(p.166)

Then Kihika had set up a meeting with Mugo 'in a week's time' to 'organize our underground movement in the new village.' Mugo was confused and 'the fatal day', Friday, therefore, caught him undecided on a course of action. He was shocked to see a poster announcing a price on Kihika's head. In such a state of mind, Mugo went and saw John Thompson the D.O. and informed him about Kihika—about his proposed meeting with Mugo. Having given out the details, Mugo felt giddy—'He did not want to know what he had done.'(p.174)

5.4 SUMMARY—CHAPTERS 14, KARANJA, MUGO, WARUI,WAMBUI, AND HARAMBEE

14

Chapter fourteen describes the happenings on 12th December 1963 in an anonymous voice from the village: 'In our village and despite the drizzling rain, men and women and children, it seemed, had emptied themselves into the streets where they sang and danced in the mud.'(p.177) At midnight , the time of the Uhuru, people 'broke into one long ululation. Then the women cried out the five Ngemi to welcome a son at birth or at circumcision. These they sang for Kihika and Mugo.'(p178) They danced Muthuio, Mucung'wa and Ndumo A three mile race was organized in the morning. Mwaura persuaded Karanja to join the race. Mumbi was shocked to see him there. She was particularly embarrassed to see both Gikonyo and Karanja present at the same place at the same time, in her presence. However, circumstances had changed. She had by now known that Mugo and not Karanja was Kihika's betrayer. While trying to strangulate her when she was at his place, Mugo had told her—

> 'Listen, Mugo! I saw my brother die. The District Officer was there and the policemen.'
> 'You have eyes and ears. Don't you know who betrayed your brother?'
> 'Karanja! You were there. General R. told us.'
> 'No!'
> She recoiled from him. In his hollow cry, in his look, she knew.
> "You!'
> 'Me- yes- me.' (*p.* 181)

In the meantime, she had told Wambui that Mugo did not want to take part in the ceremonies. However—

> The knowledge she carried inside her involved her in a new dilemma: either Karanja or Mugo. But she did not want anybody to die or come to harm because of her brother. She wished she could talk to Gikonyo, who might find a way out. (p.181)

Gikonyo, while running in the race, recalled another one. In fact, he heard a train's whistle in his mind:

> He heard a train rumbling at the Rung'ei station. He thought of his father in the Rift Valley provinces. Was he really alive? What did he look like? He traversed the wide field of his childhood, early manhood, romance with Mumbi; Kihika, the Emergency, the detention camps, the stones on the pavement, the return home to betrayal passed through his mind in rapid succession. How Mumbi had dominated his life. Her very absence had unarmed him and made him break down. He angrily jerked his head,

compelling himself to concentrate on the present race. He and Karanja were rivals again. But rivals for what? For whom were they competing? Karanja is only mocking me, he thought. He seethed with hatred as he panted and mopped sweat away from his forehead. He ran on, the desire to win inflamed him. He maintained his place close behind Karanja. His aim was to keep a certain pace, reserving his energy for the last lap or so, when he would dash forward, trusting his muscles would obey his will.(pp.181-182)

Karanja too recalled

> 'a scene, long ago, at the Railway Station, when he stood there fighting his knowledge that Gikonyo and Mumbi were left behind, alone. How he had yearned for the woman...Later when he proposed to her, she refused him—with a smile. And that refusal irrevocably bound him to her. He waited for his chance...He sold the Party and Oath secrets, the price of remaining near Mumbi. Thereafter the wheel of things drove him into greater and greater reliance on the whiteman. That reliance gave him power—power to save, to imprison, to kill. Men cowered before him; he despised and also feared them. Women offered their naked bodies to him; even some of the most respectable came to him by night. But Mumbi, his Mumbi, would not yield, he could not never bring himself to force her. Ironically, as he thought later, as he thought now, she only lay under him when he stood on the brink of defeat. He had felt a momentary pang of intense victory which, seconds later, after the act, melted into utter isolation and humiliation. He had taken advantage of her. For this, so he thought, she despised him. He could not face her—not after that shoe which caught him in the face and provoked blinding tears. He had always wanted Mumbi to come to him, freely because he was important to her, irresistible. (pp.182-183)

And now with the security provided by the whiteman already gone, he walked in the dark corridors. He could not see the sun. and then the letter had come.

Why? He had ignored Mumbi's warning and come. A new hope had rekindled his heart after learning that Mumbi had left her husband.

The race had now been reduced to two men leading—Gikonyo and Karanja. General R. running next to them, recalled his childhood in Nyeri where he had a chequered childhood and youth, what with a durnken father and a cowering mother. He had finally managed to get away by joining the British army during the war.

Koinandu, who was in the race too, recalled his own youth, the experience during the war and thereafter. He had once raped a white woman he had worked for and we are now told that she was none other than Dr. Lynd.

The race therefore turns out to be a kind of journey down the memory lane for almost all principal characters of the novel.

The race was soon was reduced to a battle 'between Gikonyo and Karanja. Few knew that there were hidden motives and passions behind this battle; the crowd merely felt its peculiar ring and tension.'(p.186)

Then an expected turn of events had seen Gikonyo tumble and Karanja, running close behind him, falling along with him. General R. had won the race.

In the meantime the sun brightened up the sky and the celebrations began. The secretary of the Party made a speech, a preacher gave a sermon and finally it was announced that General R. would speak. He recalled for the audience the reason for their fighting:

> 'You ask us why we fought, why we lived in the forest with wild beasts. You ask why we killed and spilt blood.
> 'The whiteman went in cars. He lived in a big house. His children went to school. But who tilled the soil on which grew coffee, tea, pyrethrum, and sisal? Who dug the roads and paid the taxes? The whiteman lived on our land. He ate what we grew and cooked. And even the crumbs from the tables, he threw to his dogs. That is why we went into the forest. He who was not on our side, was against us. That is why we killed our black brothers. Because, inside, they were whitemen. And I know even now this war is not ended. We get Uhuru today. Tomorrow we shall ask: where is the land? Where is the food? Where are the schools? Let therefore these things be done now, for we do not want another war...no more blood in my...in these our hands...'(pp.191-192)

And then General R. said—

> 'May be he who betrayed Kihika is here, now, in this crowd. We ask him to come forward to this platform, to confess and repent before us all.'(p.192)

No body had seen Mugo come to the scene who was now standing up. People waited for him to speak:

> 'You asked for Judas,' he started. 'You asked for the man who led Kihika to this tree, here. That man stands before you, now. Kihika came to me by night. He put his life into my hands, and I sold it to the whiteman. And this thing has eaten into my life all these years.' (*p.* 193)

The sun had faded; clouds were gathering in the sky. Nyamu, Warui, General R., and a few other elders remained behind to complete the sacrifice before the storm.

Karanja

After the meeting, Karanja came to his mother's hut. He was in a foul mood although he knew how narrowly he had escaped death, thanks to Mugo. He had decided to go back to Githima when he saw Mumbi. He walked upto her, enquired about Gikonyo and said that he wanted to thank her for the note, the real significance he did not realize then since they had wanted to kill him. On Mumbi's asking him as to who told him this, he narrated to her what had happened at the meeting: how Mugo had come to the meeting and had confessed. Then he had asked Mumbi to see the child for the last time but Mumbi had said no, asking him to leave her alone.

Riding a bus to Githima, Karanja recalled his past—how he had, after Kihika's death, confessed his oath, become a homeguard and later a chief. He had been extremely frustrated after Mumbi had declined his offer of marriage. He had first become a 'hood'—a person who identified—incognito— the Mau Mau activists and later a ruthless killer on behalf of the whiteman:

> When he shot them, they seemed less like human beings and more like animals. At first this had merely thrilled Karanja and made him feel a new man, a part of an invisible might whose symbol was the whiteman. Later, this consciousness of power, this ability to dispose of human life by merely pulling a trigger, so obsessed him that it became a need. Now that power had gone.(p.199)

Mugo

Coming back from the hospital where she had been visiting Gikonyo who had refused to acknowledge her presence, Mumbi was in a foul mood. The news about Mugo's public confession had upset her further and she vowed not to go back to Gikonyo –

ever. Her mother berated her for that, reminding her that as per customs Gikonyo was still her husband until he asked for his bride-price back. Sulking, Mumbi sat with her parents when her father observed about Mugo:

> 'He was a brave man inside,' he said. 'He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become a Chief. Tell me another person who would have exposed his soul for all the eyes to peck at...Remember that few people in that meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I-we-too-in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at.'(p.202)

Mumbi, on hearing this, regretted that she had not gone to see Mugo before coming to her parent's place. She resolved to go the next day, which she did. However, she did not find Mugo in his hut. She also tried to meet General R. but he too was not available in his hut.

While Mumbi is re-enacting in her mind, the scene in Mugo's hut when she had visited him, the author in his omniscient presence, lets us—the readers into the mind of Mugo after he had made the confession to her:

> Why should I not let Karanja bear the blame? He dismissed the temptation and stood up. How else could he ever look Mumbi in the face? ...He would stand there and publicly own the crime...As soon as the first words were out, Mugo felt light. A load of many years was lifted from his shoulders. He felt free, sure, confident.(p.204)

After the confession when he had returned to his hut, dismissing the idea of running away, he was visited in his hut by General R. and Lieutenant Koinandu who had told him tersely that the trial was scheduled for later that night and Wambui was to be the judge while they –both himself and Koinandu—would be the only elders present.

'I am ready,' Mugo said, and stood up, without looking at his visitors. General R. and Lt. Koinandu had then led him out of the hut.

Warui, Wambui

Mumbi had decided to go to Mugo's hut the next day. When she went there, she could not find him and when she returned in the night, he still wasn't there. Then she went to Wambui's hut to enquire about him, she found both Warui and Wambui sitting and brooding over the happenings of the past few days. First the accident in which Gikonyo had injured his arm, then the confession by Mugo and then the death of the old woman – Gitogo's mother—who used to live alone in her hut. On Mumbi's enquiring about Mugo, Wambui did not answer her straight, hiding the fact that on the night of the confession, General R. and Lieutenant Koinandu had visited Mugo in his hut and told him about the trial later that night, in which Wambui was to be the judge and besides himself, Lieutenant Koinandu would be the other person present.

When Mumbi told them that Mugo had confessed to her the night previous to the Celebrations when she had visited him in his hut, both Warui and Wambui were surprised, particularly when Mumbi mentioned that she had seen the pain of guilt in Mugo's eyes. Both then observed that they had been deceived by Mugo's eyes. It is apparent, although it is not mentioned clearly that Mugo had had to pay for the crime of betraying Kihika with his life.

Mumbi went home, very disturbed. However, life had to go on:

> Perhaps we should not have tried him, she muttered. Then she shook herself, trying to bring her thougts to the present. I must light the fire. First I must sweep the room. How dirt can so quickly collect in a clean hut!(p.210)

The chapter begins with Gikonyo , convalescing in the hospital, recalling his detention days in Wamumu in the Mweya plains in the Embu district. Here he would often recall his association with Mumbi and would desire intensely to be united with her again. It was there, Gikonyo recalled, that he had first decided to carve out a wooden three-legged stool from a Muiri stem –a wedding gift for Mumbi. He also recalled, lying there in the hospital bed, Mugo's confession and then his own confession of oath before the authorities. What however, puzzled him was the stoic silence of Mumbi and he shuddered to imagine the consequences of revealing to her his secret of having confessed his oath. He also tried to imagine how his children from Mumbi would look like. This desire to be reunited with Mumbi filled him once again with the desire to carve out the stool and all those various figures he had planned to carve on the legs as well as the face on the seat –the face of a woman.

When Mumbi came to see him next, after a day's gap, she told him about the illness of the child. Gikonyo showed concern for the child and also offered that they should speak about the child. After a lot of reluctance, Mumbi agreed to do so for the sake of their future relationship. Thrilled, Gikonyo decided in his mind at once, to carve out the image of the woman on the stool as that of a pregnant woman—'big with child'.

This is the note—a note full of hope represented with the image of a pregnant woman—on which the novel ends. Mumbi represents, clearly, the nation of Kenya, her being big with child representing future hopes of the nation. Their—Gikonyo's and Mumbi's— agreeing to talk over the matter about the child represents the attempt of the divided nation to reconcile its various sections—those who had fought the whiteman for the freedom of the nation and those who had sided with the whiteman—without apportioning blame to one other.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have provided a detailed chapter-by-chapter summary of the novel, *A Grain of Wheat*. The emphasis has been on not only summarizing the story but also on highlighting the theme and focussing on the major characters in the novel. Each chapter summary is supplemented by key quotations from the text. The summary, however, has been provided with the objective of encouraging the student to read the text of the novel in the original. This summary is in no way a substitute for the reading of the text.

UNIT 6 *A GRAIN OF WHEAT* – AN EVALUATION

6.0 Objectives
6.1 The Context
  6.1.1 The Colonization
  6.1.2 Freedom Struggle—the Militant Phase
  6.1.3 Mau Mau—The Origins
6.2 *A Grain of Wheat* and *Carcase for Hounds* –History as Fiction
6.3 Women and the Freedom Movement—*A Grain of Wheat*
  6.3.1 Freedom Movement and Social Tensions:Gikonyo and Mumbi
6.4 *A Grain of Wheat*: John Thompson, Mau Mau and the Colonization of Kenya
6.5 Portraying the Freedom Struggle—Ngugi and Mwangi
  6.5.1 History and Ideology: Ngugi's Kihika and Mwangi's Haraka
6.6 The Title
6.7 Characterization
  6.7.1 Warui
  6.7.2 Wambui
  6.7.3 Koina
  6.7.4 General R.
  6.7.5 Gatu
  6.7.6 Gikonyo
  6.7.7 Mugo
6.8 Conclusion: *A Grain of Wheat* as a Complex Portrayal of History
6.9 Let Us Sum Up
6.10 Questions
6.11 Selected Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this Unit is to present an evaluation of *A Grain of Wheat* as a piece of fiction based on the history of the Kenyan National Movement, setting up a comparison wherever possible with another work of fiction based on the same theme. As T.S Eliot reminds us, a literary critic must compare and analyze. Thus a comparison between *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *Carcase for Hounds* by Meja Mwangi, another Kenyan novelist fictionalising the Kenyan National Movement would be offered during the course of discussion in this Unit.

6.1 THE CONTEXT

6.1.1 The Colonization

The Kenyan national movement--particularly its violent phase--has been the subject of a number of literary works by Kenyans in English. We shall, in this Unit, analyse and evaluate *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. But before we do so, we may like to go into the details of the freedom struggle itself. These details form the pre/text of the novel and only in the light of these details can we evaluate the treatment of this aspect of Kenyan history by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

As stated in an earlier Unit, the covert colonisation of the Kenyan people began towards the end of the 19th century through the granting of a Royal Charter for Trade to the Imperial East African Trading Company within the bounds of what was then known as the East Africa Protectorate. The annexation, however, became overt and formal when the company withdrew for financial reasons and the British government took over the control of the territory in its own hands and appointed a Commissioner for the Protectorate.The resistance against the colonial government began almost

simultaneously with the annexation of the region, but such resistance was in the form of isolated incidents involving small groups of people who were immediately affected by the British control of the region. The government decision to bring in foreign settlers from Europe, Asia and South Africa further complicated the situation and made the freedom struggle by Kenyans not only a prolonged one but also a more bitter one. In the words of Nkrumah:

> Kenya under colonial rule, unlike the average colony in West Africa, was plagued with settler problems. Consequently, the liberation struggle in Kenya was bound to be one of the most dramatic in the history of the Continent.(*Not Yet Uhuru*: p.xiv)

The struggle after decades of peaceful constitutional moves both inside and outside the legislative council, took a violent turn in the early fifties when the cup of Kenyans' patient suffering and humiliation at the hands of both the settlers and the colonial government began to overflow.

> The freedom movement was the result of ills of colonisation affecting almost all tribes in Kenya. Their lands were taken away from them by the Europeans. Their education cut, their freedom curtailed through forced labour, their wages made miserably low and their pride and dignity trampled through disallowance of observance of tribal customs and rituals and finally through the practice of obnoxious colour bar. (*Mau Mau from Within* p.74)

Although, the struggle against colonisation began almost simultaneously with the act of colonisation, such acts of resistance were both spontaneous and sporadic. These acts, obviously, did not have much impact because of a lack of perspective, proper planning and coordination among various sections of the society.

6.1.2 Freedom Struggle—the Militant Phase

The most violent phase of the freedom movement occurred between the years 1952 and 1957. It all began when the most moderate demands made in 1951 were turned down by the British Socialist Government and a tougher attitude became apparent in the inner councils of the Africans. The basic reason had, of course, been the British government's policy of taking over the most fertile land from the Africans and giving it to the Europeans to cultivate. This led to a chronic shortage of land in the African reserves. As a result, thousands of unemployed youths were forced to work on European farms at miserably low wages and in appalling conditions.

The post-second world war phase saw a new revolutionary atmosphere in Kenya. The social and economic grievance became plainer as more and more Africans became educated and they began to understand that the social system was not immutable. Moreover, thousands of Kenyan soldiers who had recently returned from war duties abroad, had travelled widely and seen Europeans at close quarters in their own home grounds.

The granting of independence to India and Pakistan also inspired ordinary Kenyans, who were now getting more impatient with each passing day. Their revolt against the colonial masters manifested itself in many ways. They, for instance, resented the patronising attitude of the clergy, who though professing Christian brotherhood, regarded the African Christians as inferior beings, Kariuki sums up this resentment in the following words:

> When the British came with their missionaries, traders and administrators we felt they had something to teach us which were good. Education, medicine, farming and industrial techniques, these we welcomed. As a tribe the

> Europeans had certain characteristics which were perhaps, not pleasant. Quick to anger, inhospitable, aloof, boorish and insensitive, they often behaved as if God created Kenya and us for their use. they accepted the dignity of a man as long as his skin was white. (*Mau Mau Detainee* p.41)

The trade unions too were clamouring for more rights and better working conditions. There were a number of strikes. This brought an offensive from the settlers and the government in the form of 'Kenya Plan'. As the details of this notorious move to convert Kenya into 'whiteman's country' became known in 1949, the radicals among the Kenyans whose political awareness had been steadily increasing over the years, decided to launch a final 'do or die' battle for the liberation of Kenya, accepting the alternative of violence, 'fully realising the suffering it would bring on all of them'.

The Oath:

> Once the decision was taken to go for militant actions, the first step was to ensure mass support for those who had gone underground. This was achieved through the administration of an 'oath' to groups of people. The unity of numbers was our strongest, indeed almost our only weapon, and plans for cementing that unity with the Movement of the oath were put in train. (*Mau Mau Detainee* p.43)

The moment the government came to know about the administration of the oath, it came down heavily on not only those who were involved in it but also on a large number of innocent people. The harsh and brutal measures taken by the government to stop the oath proved to be counter productive as more and more young people impatient for a change took the oath.

6.1.3 Mau Mau—the Origins

It was during a raid on the oathing ceremonies at Naivasha that the police party is first reported to have heard the term 'Mau Mau', a name with which they subsequently tried to damn the entire national freedom movement in Kenya, although as Kaggia says, 'we ourselves had no particular name for it in the early days'. The world 'Mau Mau' has no meaning in either Gikuyu or Swahili and there are interesting speculations about its origin. Some suggested that the expression was arrived at through transposition of the world 'Uma-Uma'--out, out--in Gikuyu, which referred to the desire of the Africans that the Europeans leave Kenya. Another explanation offered is that a witness at the Naivasha trial used the expression 'mumumumu', referring to the whispered voices at the oathing ceremonies. This was misheard by journalists as 'Mau Mau' and so reported in the story. Njama, however, links the expression to the Gikuyu word 'Muma' meaning oath, used by a witness at the Naivasha trial and which a police officer was unable to pronounce or spell correctly. He, therefore, created his own pronunciation--Mau Mau.

As the movement grew in strength, simultaneous with the most repressive measures used against the Kenyans at large and the Gikuyu in particular, the British government let loose most foul propaganda to paint the entire movement in total black.

The entire propaganda machinery of the government swung into action. L.B.S. Leakey in his *Defeating Mau Mau* has painted a one-sided and completely distorted picture of the Kenyan reality:

> ...the noble whiteman, who fervently engaged in bringing civilisation, Christianity, education and the 'good life' to Kenya's backward natives, was suddenly forced to defend self and property, law and order, peace and morality against the treacherous attack of atavistic savages gone mad with a blood lust.

The freedom movement, contrary to the false propaganda unleashed by both the settlers and the colonial government, was the result of colonisation affecting almost all tribes in Kenya. The forcible 'alienation' of land for exclusive European use, the acts of forced labour at miserably low wages, the disallowance of observance of tribal customs and rituals and the observance of the colour bar all compounded together, led to a situation wherein a solution to all these ills was sought to be achieved through the single demand for national freedom.

As in the case of motives of the movement, so also with respect to the details of the sufferings of Kenyans during the struggle, the colonial government told blatant lies. News of atrocities on common Kenyans in the reserves, on those who had been detained in specially created camps and on those who sought refuge in the jungles was suppressed while details of raids by guerrilla fighters were blown out of proportion to malign the movement. But the truth, they say, is like sand held in a closed fist, which always manages to slip out and be revealed. So did the details of gory killings and cruelties perpetrated on Kenyans, particularly during the emergency:

> A significant sector of the European settler community tended to interpret the emergency declaration and legislation as promulgating a sort of 'open season' on Kikuyu, Embu and Meru tribesmen. Forced cofessions, beatings, robbery of stock, food and clothing, brutalising of various sorts and outright killings were frequent enough occurences to arouse a fear in the heart of most Kikuyu that the intent of the whitemen was to eliminate the whole Kikuyu tribe. (*Mau Mau from Within* p.71)

Emergency—the crackdown:

The magnitude of the toll of this 'Open season' can be gauged from the fact that during the emergency alone some 10,000 Africans were killed by the security forces and over 80,000 were detained in various camps. Here they were subjected to indescribable brutalities. No detainee was released until he had been passed along a security clearance channel known as 'Pipe line'. Among the Emergency casualties not recorded are the victims of the 'Pipe line' who were injured and permanently disabled by torture to extract confession.

Detention Camps:

Manyani was the largest and perhaps the most notorious camp. This is what Kariuki, himself a detainee at the camp, has to say about the conditions there:

> 'Manyani', the largest camp, capable of holding upto 30,000 of us, is now a word deeply entrenched in the language of every tribe in Kenya, and no one hopes to understand the present temper of Kenya African politics without some awareness of the life led by our 80,000 detainees during those emergency years. (*Mau Mau Detainee* p.27)

Conditions in the reserves were no better either, where the chiefs, the home guards and other such henchmen ruled the roost with the help of local administrative authorities.

With all their sophisticated weapons and war machinery, as also trained troops, the British government could not crush the freedom movement. Fighting against heavy odds of scarce resources, lack of training, etc., and against superior forces, the guerrillas covered themselves with glory by continuing the struggle for more than four years, which earned them universal acclaim.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, General R. and Lieutenant Koinandu –together with Kihika, who of course is dead before the action of the novel takes place and is only recalled by various characters-- represent the Forest Fighters. Not only do they tell the readers—through their reminiscences on the eve of Uhuru—their life in the jungles but they also pursue the betrayer of Kihiha with a single-minded devotion that is symptomatic of their unflinching devotion for the cause of the national freedom struggle.

We will now discuss Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*. It will be our endeavour firstly to discover his point of view from his writings and secondly evaluate this first vis-à-vis the views of another major writer on the same theme—Meja Mwangi in his *Carcase for Hounds* (1974)—and then the truth about the struggle as enumerated above by major participant historians like J.M. Kariuki, Karari Njama, Bildad Kaggia and Oginga Odinga.

6.2 *A GRAIN OF WHEAT* AND *CARCASE FOR HOUNDS*—HISTORY AS FICTION

A Grain of Wheat is a novel about the freedom movement. Through a series of flashbacks in the lives and experiences of his principal characters--Mugo, Gikonyo, Mumbi, Kihika, Karanja and Thompson--all of who reflect on it on the eve of the Uhuru, Ngugi is able to weave, extremely skilfully, a multi-faced but a powerful picture of the struggle. Both through direct narration and through reflections by his characters, Ngugi creates an atmosphere of hopes and fears, successes and defeats, loyalties and betrayals that were, as we have seen above, typical of the period of the struggle. *A Grain of Wheat* is the story of a group of people from a particular village--Thabai--who are about to celebrate the Uhuru day which is only four days later. This however is also the occasion when each one of them including the white D.O. Thompson, takes stock of his or her role in the freedom struggle, particularly during the emergency and the 'Mau Mau' phase of the struggle. Mugo recalls his betrayal of Kihika, the legendary youthful revolutionary who was hanged. Gikonyo recalls his confession of the oath during interrogation in the detention camp. Mumbi recalls the circumstances under which she was forced to submit herself to Karanja, the village Chief and a collaborator of the colonial administration. Karanja recalls his subservience to the D.O., while Thompson and his wife recall their role as a part of the white colonial administration that was trying its best to 'civilise' the Africans.

A Grain of Wheat—Mugo Recalls

The novel opens with Mugo, a resident of Thabai village in Kamanduru district and a civilian who had suffered extensively at the hands of the government during the freedom struggle, getting up early in the morning for going to cultivate his shamba. Our first impression of him is that he is a strange old man who appears to be seeing phantoms where there are none; one who, like Hester Pryne in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, seems to be guarding something within him which he feels every one is out to seek and unravel on this fateful day. Among the first persons he meets is Githua, a fellow victim of the state violence who had not only lost a leg in it but who seems to have gone soft in the head too: "I tell you before the Emergency, I was like you before the white man did this to me with bullets, I could work with both hands." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.4)

As we already know from the accounts of Kariuki, Njama, General China and Bildad Kaggia, the story of Githua is the story of thousands who were disabled during the struggle and Githua's remarks put Mugo in a mood for reminiscing on the cruelties of the white man, the utter senseless killings and tortures that they indulged in. Passing by the hut of an old woman, Mugo recalls how her only son Gitogo, who was both

deaf and dumb, was killed by the government troops during one of their raids on the village:

> People were being collected into the town square, the market place, for screening. Githogo ran to a shop, jumped over the counter and almost fell into the shopkeeper whom he found covering amongst the empty bags....'Halt!' the whiteman shouted. Githogo continued running. Something hit him at the back. He raised his arms in the air. He fell on his stomach. Apparently the bullet had touched his heart. The soldier left his place. Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.6)

The last sentence--*Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead*--seems to 'touch' the readers with the same force as the bullet that had killed Gitogo. With this one sentence Ngugi had nailed all those lies which talked of 'Mau Mau' terrorists being killed in 'encounters' with the troops.

Back from the Shamba, Mugo is visited on behalf of the party by a group of village elders: Warui, Wambui and Gikonyo, who want him to lead the celebrations for the Uhuru by making the main speech of the day. Sitting with them and discussing the history of the country, Mugo recalled--"...the day the whiteman came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that whiteman was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar; his humility was touching." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.12) Gradually, however, something else happened which surprised the people around:

> Soon the people saw the whiteman had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position. He had already pulled the grass-thatched hut and erected a more permanent building. Elders of the land protested. They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried not the Bible, but the sword. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.14)

There could not have been a more precise yet more forthright portrayal of that part of Kenyan history towards the end of the nineteenth century when the British launched a two-pronged attack by the clergy and the soldier to colonise Kenya. It was then, Mugo recalls, that Harry Thuku had appeared on the scene telling them of the discontent with taxation, forced labour on white settler's land and of uprooting of thousands as a result of resettlement schemes for white soldiers from abroad. It was after he had formed a party and had been arrested that the first protest rally took place. It was 1923, Warui, another elder of the village who was in the crowd, vividly recalls:

> On the fourth day they marched forward singing. The police who waited for them with guns fixed with bayonets, opened fire. Three men raised their arms in the air. It is said that as they fell down they clutched soil in their fists. Another volley scattered the crowd. A man and a woman fell, their blood spurted out. People ran in all directions. Within a few seconds the big crowd had dispersed; nothing remained but fifteen crooked watchers on the ground, outside the State house. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.14)

Mugo then goes on to recall the changing mood of the people--a change from one of defiance to one of militant struggle. Kihika, a fighter who had inspired hundreds of young men had said in an address: "This is not 1920. What we now want is action, a blow which will tell." Kihika, like many others before, had exposed the game of deceit played by the colonisers in the guise of religion:

> We went to their church. Mubia, in white robes, opened the Bible. He said. Let us kneel down to pray. We knelt down. Mubia said. Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know his remained open so that he could read the word. When

> we opened our eyes our land was gone and the Sword of flames stood on guard. As for Mubia, he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasure in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.15)

Once again, the last sentence—*But he laid his on earth, our earth*--exposes the two-pronged attack of the colonial British--through settlers as well as the church--more forcefully then many a long document on the issue.

After the arrest of Kenyatta, Mugo recalls, Kihika disappeared into the forest, later to be followed by a handful of youngmen from Thabai and Rung'ei. Ngugi's message is clear: this is how Mau Mau was born--out of the frustrations of the people to persuade the colonial masters to restore to them what was theirs.

It may not be out of place here at this juncture to refer to another novel based on the same theme written by Meja Mwangi--*Carcase for Hounds*--which suggests an altogether different reason for the beginning of Mau Mau activities. General Haraka, the hero of Mwangi's novel, who is the leader of a group of guerillas, recalls how he had become a Mau Mau activist:

> Haraka remembered well when the white man struck him. It came as a resounding surprise, right across his face and into his heart. Though he was stunned, his reaction was quick. Spontaneous. He struck back a blow full of hate and distaste and protest against oppression. The D.C. collapsed and lay unmoving on the dusty floor of the office. For a second, a surge of well-being, of selfish revenge flooded him so that he stood rooted to the spot. Then a splinter of fear wedged its way into his mind. Had he killed him? No, the man was only unconscious. Then the magnitude of his crime sank in. Striking a white man was unheard of. Striking a District Commissioner senseless was unthinkable. The other white men would surely take revenge. An affront to the Queen! They might even shoot him....He had to run. Where to? *Naturally* into the forest, to the little terrorist leader." (*Carcase for Hounds* p.20)

Thus Maguru, son of Nyaga, is transformed into a freedom fighter by exchanging blows with his boss, the D.C. and by fleeing from punishment. The subtle use of the word '*Naturally*' in the last sentence cleverly suggests that most freedom fighters were such criminals fleeing from the law.

Ngugi, like Mwangi in *Carcase for Hounds*, also recalls through his characters, many raids by the freedom fighters but unlike Mwanti he places these raids in their proper perspective. They raided to obtain rations and ammunition, as also to cripple and destroy the machinery of oppression. Kihika and his fellow fighters were not, a gang of terrorists who derived sadistic pleasure out of such raids and killings. As Kihika tells Mugo "We can't just kill anybody....we are not murderers. We are not hangmen like Robson--killing men or women without cause or purpose." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.166)

As we know from the accounts by various freedom fighters, the torture of civilians had begun on a mass scale simultaneously with the militant struggle—a fact that is borne out by the passing of over a million Kenyans through the concentration camps and the 'pipeline' during the four years of the emergency:

> "Kihika was tortured. Some say that the neck of a bottle was wedged into his body through the anus as the white people in the Special Branch tried to wrest the secrets of the forest from him." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.17)

Compared to the stories of atrocities or detainees in Manyani, Hola and Lari camps, Ngugi's above description appears to be an artistic understatement.

6.3 WOMEN AND THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT—*A GRAIN OF WHEAT*

Warui, the oldest of those who survived, recalls the role of Wambu:

> "Wambui was not very old, although she had lost most of her teeth. During the Emergency, she carried secrets from the villager to the forest and back to the villagers and towns. She knew the underground movements in Nakuru, Elburgon and other places in an outside Rift valley." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.19)

Several women had played a very heroic role in the freedom movement--the names of Me Kitilifi and Mary Nyanjiru spring to the mind immediately--and through Wambui and Mumbi, Ngugi is paying a tribute to those heroic women warriors. He was to do this again through the character of 'the woman' in his *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976). In fact, with *A Grain of Wheat* Ngugi began a conscious attempt to not only create positively powerful women characters but also began to make them more 'visible' by providing them with greater 'space' in his books. This effort culminated in his portrayal of Wariinga as the protagonist in his *Devil on the Cross*.

The suppression of the movement, as observed earlier, had brought untold miseries on a very large section of civilian population particularly the women. *A Grain of Wheat*, highlights this through the story of Gikonyo and Mumbi--a very poignant portrayal of their love for each other through the tribulations of detention and physical suffering during the emergency. Women's suffering is also highlighted by references to an old woman in the Thabia village whose son—a deaf and dumb young man—was shot dead by soldiers in cold blood during a raid on the village and who had since then lost all interest in living.

In all Ngugi writings—novels, stories, plays—there are always women characters with qualities of unmatched patriotism, stoicism and suffering. These represent the ordinary Kenyan women who played a very significant role during the freedom struggle. However, the highest tribute paid to such womenfolk of Kenya was paid by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo in their joint play—*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*—wherein a very powerful character has been created who is called Woman—simply—and who represents the women of Kenya.

6.3.1 Freedom Movement and Social Tensions: Gikonyo and Mumbi

The story of Gikonyo and Mumbi which, apart from that of Mugo, is the central story of the novel, represents the social tensions spawned by the disruption of traditional African life with the intervention of colonialism and its aftermath. The hardships which Mumbi has to undergo to sustain herself and her parents-in-law after Gikonyo had been arrested and sent to the detention camp, represents the hardships suffered by tens of thousands of families whose lives broke down, thanks to the crackdown after the imposition of the Emergency. Inhuman oppression was let loose by soldiers through bulldozing of whole villages and uprooting people including the raping of women. Even the henchmen of the colonial administration –home guards and village chiefs—exploited the situation to stamp their authority by letting loose a rein of terror and withholding basic needs like food and extracting all kinds of price from their fellow villagers, including sexual gratification from women of the village. The way Karanja went after the people of his village, killing some, severely beating others and bartering food for sex , represents this very ugly face of the Emergency. The manner in which he stalks Mumbi –now cajoling, now threatening, now telling the truth about the atrocities in detention camps, now telling blatant lies about the detainees—is a sordid story which had a thousand replications in real life. And finally, when Mumbi gives in to him and lets him make love to her—the circumstances ironically are more

favourable to her at that point of time because Gikonyo has been freed and is on his way home—only shows that such social disruption would continue to have its negative impact on the lives of people even after the Uhuru is achieved. And this is what precisely happens when Gikonyo discovers that Mumbi has had a child from Karanja in his absence. Refusing to accept the bizarre and abnormal circumstance under which it must have happened—and we do know that the circumstances were both bizarre and very abnormal—he nearly gives up his wife, something quite rare and unusual in the traditional African way of life.

6.4 A *GRAIN OF WHEAT:* JOHN THOMPSON, MAU MAU AND THE COLONIZATION OF KENYA

Ngugi also presents in *A Grain of Wheat*, the whiteman's response to the Uhuru. Thompson, the D.O., a loyal British bureaucrat, cannot reconcile himself to this changed new reality and has therefore decided to quit his job as well as the country. He too reminiscences. He believes that all that they had built in Kenya with so much of hard work would now be wasted since the blacks are incapable of maintaining it, let alone building on it. "Would these things remain after Thursday? Perhaps for two months: and then--test tubes and beakers would be broken or lie unwashed on the cement, the hot houses and seed beds strewn with wild plants and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed, would gradually creep into a litter-filled compound." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.38)

Thompson also recalls another milestone in his career in Kenya: the strike at the Rira detention camp when he was the officer incharge. "At Rira, the tragedy of his life occurred. A hunger strike, a little beating and eleven detainees died: the fact leaked out. Because he was officer incharge, Thompson's name was bandied about in the House of Commons and in the world press." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.42)

His regret is over two things: the leaking of the news and the bandying about of his name. Thompson's regret, like that of most whites at that time, was also because of the realisation that they, the whites, too were dispensable. "Thompson felt that silent pain, almost agony that people feel at the knowledge that they might not be indispensable after all." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.42)

His wife too has similar feelings which she too like her husband tries to hide behind her doubts about the capabilities of their African successors: "Was she really using this kitchen for the last time? Would she never, never see Githima again? Would her flowers mean anything to whoever would take her place in this house." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.44)

Thompson is one of those who considered the British colonial expansion to be an act of moral crusade to civilise the world. The British, he believed, were like 'Prospero in Africa'--the land of Calibans. Having accepted that position, he goes on to justify the British action against the freedom fighters:

> No government can tolerate anarchy, no civilisation can be built on this violence and savagery. Mau Mau is evil: a movement which if not checked will mean complete destruction of all the values on which our civilisation has thriven. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.72)

However, it was left to Kihika and scores of young men who had heard the stories of whiteman from their elders to discover the real face of Prospero:

> Kihika's interest in politics began when he was a small boy and sat under the feet of Warui listening to stories of how the land was taken from black people... Warui needed only a listener he recounted the deeds of Waiyaki

and other warriors who by 1900 had been killed in the struggle to drive out the whiteman from the land: of young Harry and the fate that befell the 1923 procession; of Muthirigu and the mission schools that forbade circumcision in order to eat, like insects, both the roots and the stems of the Gikuyu society. Unknown to those around him, Kihika's heart hardened towards 'these people', long before he had even encountered a white face. Soldiers came back from the war and told stories of what they had seen in Burma, Egypt, Palestine and India; wasn't Mahatma Gandhi the saint, leading the Indian people against the British rule? Kihika fed on these stories, his imagination and daily observations told him the rest; from early on, he had visions of himself, a saint, leading the Gikuyu people to freedom and power. (*A Grain of Wheat* pp.72-73).

6.5 PORTRAYING THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE: NGUGI AND MWANGI

One has only to contrast this with general Haraka's reminiscences about his youth and the way he became a freedom fighter, (*Carcase for Hounds* p.20) to know the difference between Meja Mwangi's portrayal of the freedom struggle and Ngugi's:

> He thought back to the time when he was not a general, not general Haraka, but simply Maguru son of Nyaga. And the Chief—he was no Chief but merely Kahuru son of Wamai. Haraka then though further back to the time when they first met at the forest station, when it was first started. Their families came from different parts of the country to work for Mr. Jackson, clearing the jungle and planting trees. The two youngmen were no more than fifteen. There was no chief in the village then. The tree men were organised by a foreman under the Forest Officer, Mr. Jackson. As the village grew it knit in the vast family of over thirty families. The younger generation formed a society of their own. This was split into sections of adolescent gangs, each led by a self-appointed youth able to dominate the others. *They stole green maize from their parents' gardens and raped village maidens in hordes.* (*Carcase for Hounds* p.18, emphasis added)

In fact, Mwangi makes general Haraka, an ex-accomplice of the colonial government:

> He remembered back to the time he headed the village security police before becoming the first chief of Pinewood Forest station that was before the Emergency and the Curfew and the forest fighters were heard of. (*Carcase for Hounds* p.19)

So here is the leader of a group of freedom fighters in the jungles--general Haraka--who was in his youth a juvenile gangster, expert at stealing green maize and raping village maidens in hordes. No wonder the general himself refers to a group as a 'gang' and Captain Kingsley considers them to be nothing but 'murderer Haraka and his band of cut-throats.' (*Carcase for Hounds* p.11)

In sharp contrast Ngugi, as we have seen above, has made use of the actual events--struggle by Waiyaki and the Procession in Nairobi for the release of Harry Thuku in which scores of Africans were killed--as a background for his fictional characters like Kihika.

6.5.1 History and Ideology: Ngugi's Kihika versus Mwangi's Haraka

Ngugi's forest fighter Kihika, incidentally, is dead before the action of the novel begins and we never meet him. Unlike Mwangi's general Haraka, he is a very sensitive young man who drew inspiration from the Indian National movement,

thereby showing a remarkable maturity of approach in recognising the commonness of all such struggles against the colonial British. "Do you know", he told his youthful friends, Gikonyo, Mumbi, Karanja and others, "why Gandhi succeeded? Because he made his people give up their fathers and mothers and serve their one Mother--India. With us Kenya is our mother." (*A Grain of Wheat* p. 83). Kihika is an ideal freedom fighter, who realising that Christianity had come to have a hold on the minds of many and that the priests were using it as a weapon to damn the freedom struggle, uses the same religious sentiment to arouse the people into action. Referring to the death of Christ, he says:

> In Kenya we want a death which will change things, that is to say, we want a true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the oath of unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.83)

Kihika is, in fact, a shrewd leader who uses various kinds of arguments to expose the real designs of the colonial masters. "My father's ten acres? That is not the important thing. Kenya belongs to black people. Can't you see that Cain was wrong? I am my brother's keeper. In any case, whether the land was stolen from Gikuyu, Ubabi or Nandi, it does not belong to the whiteman. And even if it did, shouldn't everybody have a share in the settled area. He owns hundreds and hundreds of acres of land. What about the black men who squat there, who sweat dry on the farms to grow coffee, tea, sisal, wheat and yet only get ten shillings a month?" (*A Grain of Wheat* p.85)

G.D. Killam in his essay on *A Grain of Wheat* in his *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, observes that Ngugi is at 'pains... to insure that his readers know that the struggle was a just one.' (1980:53). He thus considers Kihika's speeches to be laboured. This is uncharitable, to say the least, since Kihika's speeches have a very forceful impact because of their spontaneity and directness backed as they are by his conviction. Once again, in contrast, are the speeches of general Haraka who had only heard about land and other problems from his little leader and repeated them parrot-like (*Carcase for Hounds* p.54) which appear to be contrived completely.

The imposition of the Emergency created a host of other social problems for not only forest fighters like Kihika but for others as well. "More men were rounded up and taken to concentration camps named detention camps for the world outside Kenya. The platform at the railway station was not always empty; girls pined for their lovers behind cold huts and prayed that their young men would come quickly from the forest or from the camps." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.90). Unlike Mwangi, who shows general Haraka, lieutenant Kimamo and others having serious doubts about their cause, (*Carcase for Hounds* p.102) Ngugi shows them very resolute for their cause. "The detainees had agreed not to confess the oath, or give away details about Mau Mau: how could anybody reveal the binding force of the Agikuyu in their call for African freedom? They bore all the ills of the Whiteman, believing somehow that he who would endure unto the end would receive leaves of victory." (*A Grain of Wheat* p. 91). The torture grew as the struggle gained strength. "A common game in Rira had been to bury a man, naked, in the hot sand, sometimes leaving him there overnight." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.116). Even those who were left behind in villages--mostly women, old people and young children--were not spared such torture. Mumbi Gikanyo's wife, recalls:

> There were two huts. One belonged to my mother, the other was mine. They told us to remove our bedding and clothes and utensils. They splashed some petrol on the grass thatch of my mother's hut. I then idly thought this was unnecessary as the grass was dry. Anyway, they poured, petrol on the dry thatch. The sun burnt hot. My mother sat on a stool by the pile of things from our huts and I stood beside her. I had a Gikoi on my head. The leader of the

> homeguards struck a match and threw it at the roof. It did not light, and the others laughed at him. They shouted and encouraged him. One of them tried to take the matches from him to demonstrate how it could be done. It became a game between them. At the fourth or fifth attempt the roof caught fire. Dark and blue smoke tossed from the roof, and the flames leaped to the sky. They went to my hut. I could not bear to see the game repeated, so I shut my eyes. (*A Grain of Wheat* pp.122-123).

Whole villages were forced to dig trenches in most inhuman working conditions. Once again, Mumbi recalls: "They drove us into it, for, you see, there was a time limit. Women were allowed out two hours before sunset to go and look for food. Nobody else was allowed out: even school children had to remain in the village. Within days, the two hours of freedom were reduced to one. And as the time limit neared, even one hour of freedom was taken away. We were prisoners in the village, and the soldiers had built their camps all round to prevent any escape. We went without food. The cry of children was terrible to hear. The new D.O. did not mind the cries. He even permitted soldiers to pick women and carry them to their tents." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.166)

It is the perpetration of such atrocities that makes Mugo remark that "a Mzungu is not a man--always remember that--he is a devil."

Neither the fighters, not the civilians are, however, scared of this naked show of sadistic brutalities. Nor do they turn their other cheek anymore: "We only hit back. You are struck on the left cheek. You turn the right cheek. One, two, three-sixty years. Then suddenly, it is always sudden, you say; I am not turning the other cheek any more. Your back to the wall, you strike back." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.126) Throughout the struggle, African collaborators played an important role on behalf of their white masters, not only justifying all that the colonial government did but also emphasising the futility of challenging the invincible might of the Mzungu. Thus Karanja says:

> The whiteman is strong. Don't ever forget that. I know, because I have tasted his power. Don't you ever deceive yourself that Jomo Kenyatta will ever be released from Lodwar. And bombs are going to be dropped into the forest as the British did in Japan and Malaya. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.130)

Once caught into the logic of surrender and collaboration, Karanja sinks deeper into such dependence:

> He sold the party and oath secrets, the price of remaining near Mumbi. Thereafter the wheel of things drove him into greater reliance on the whiteman. That reliance gave him power--power to save, to imprison, to kill. Men cowered before him; he despised and also feared them. Women offered their naked bodies to him; even some of the most respectable came to him by night." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.182)

Ngugi, in fact, goes on to show the complete dehumanisation of Karanja by the colonial machinery. When he shot the freedom fighters or innocent citizens, "they seemed less like human beings and more like animals. At first this had merely thrilled Karanja and made him feel a new man, a part of an invisible might whose symbol was the whiteman. Later, this consciousness of power, this ability to dispose of human life by merely pulling a trigger, so obsessed that it became a need." (*A Grain of Wheat* p.199)

6.6 THE TITLE

You may have wondered what the title of the novel *A Grain of Wheat* means. Ngugi chooses a Christian myth and a religious framework to depict the violent freedom movement in Kenya. The title of the novel is itself from the Bible:

> Thou fool, that which Thou sowest is not quickened, except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare again, it may chance of wheat, of some other grain.
>
> (I *Corinthians* 15:36)

This epigraph appended to the novel is an attempt by St. Paul to answer queries by some Corinthians as to the possibility of the resurrection of the mortal body of Christ. St. Paul hints at the 'potentiality' of the mortal frame to get itself renewed in life for 'a second coming.' But like a sown seed, it has to die first before it can be born again. The image of dying to be born again runs recurrently and is central to the novel. In other words, the alchemy of "rebirth and regeneration" always lies embedded in a dying seed as a strong "potential" only waiting to be born again "through the will of *God.*"(*African Literature Today* No.7 *p.* 111)

Ngugi applies this Christian epigraph to the gory nationalist struggle against colonialism. Referring to the matyrdom of Waiyaki during the early phase of this struggle, the novelist observes: "Waiyaki's blood contained within it a seed, a grain, which gave birth to a movement whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil" (*p.* 12) Waiyaki sacrifices his life. But he rises again Phoenix—like in the form of a potential and formidable movement. This movement is organically linked to the soil of the people so as to provide succour, strength and inspiration to them in designing and building a new nation corresponding to their aspirations. Emphasising the need for sacrifice by one and all for a national cause, Kihika says:

> I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ. Christ then is not one person. All those who take up the cross of liberating Kenya are the true Christs for us Kenyan people(*p.*95).

According to Govind Naraian Sharma, "Kihika is a true Christ who, through sacrifice, not only justifies himself but also brings about a revolution in the lives of his friends and followers by showing them the way to the spiritual regeneration." (*African Literature Today* No.10 *p.170)* Such a spirited defence of Kihika seeks to transcend the limitations of a religious principle so as to cover and embrace a secular pursuit; a social ethic; a national aspiration and a sense of commitment. Obviously, Kihika's sense of religion is not confined to its meaning in an abstraction but it is sought to be applied to a people engaged in a grim battle against colonial forces. Kihika feels stung by a remark made by his friend, Karanja, who reminds Kihika of his own saying that "Jesus had failed." (*p.*94) Karanja even wonders whether Kihika is trying to resort to religious revivalism. For a moment, Kihika is nonplussed. But he does not give in to the sarcasm or the logistics of Karanja. He continues to argue forcefully:

> Pressed people have a cross to bear. The Jews refused to carry it and were scattered like dust all over the earth.....In Kenya we want deaths which will change things, that is to say, we want true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. (*P.*95)

This passage has several layers of meaning and inferences. It points out categorically that Christ had failed in the Kenyan context. This is a common phenomenon in any colonial situation where the alien religion of Christianity always tended to support an oppressive regime causing hardships to the colonised. Ngugi is of the view that Christianity as an organised institution, paved the way for the coloniser and unhesitatingly supported him in consolidating his position in the colonies. Alongwith religion the imperial enterprise also used language as a tool of continued colonisation.

For example, English continues to occupy a superior status vis-à-vis indigenous languages in most colonised cultures.

Africans were also taken away from their places as slaves and scattered "all over the earth." Hence, the novelist appeals to the suffering masses the world over "to carry the cross" and bear the burden and take the fire right into the midst of the enemy's camp using the tools of the religion and the sword or the gun which had been used so far by the colonial master. In short, Ngugi is using Christian mythology to inspire a feeling of regeneration and revolution among oppressed peoples.

6.7 CHARACTERISATION

The portrayal of various characters in *A Grain of Wheat* is discussed in terms of their distinct peculiar circumstances and their sense of identity with the community.

6.7.1 Warui

"**Warui's** life was.....the story of the movement", (*p.*18) which itself came into being imperceptibly as soon as the prophecy of Mugo wa Kabira about the arrival of "a people with clothes like the butterflies" (*p.*10) became a reality. Warui is the living symbol, an important witness and an active participant in the 1923 procession against the arrest of Harry Thuku and in a similar upsurge against the imprisonment of Jomo Kenyatta and others in 1952. It is only in the fitness of things that he is given a place of prominence at the Uhuru celebrations of Dec.12, 1963. It is an honour to a rural individual peasant who represents the collective conscience of the rural peasantry of Kenya.

6.7.2 Wambui

Wambui is not as old as Warui. She is an active participant in the Movement during the emergency in Kenya. She is something like a "courier" of the modern Liberationist struggles entrusted with the job of carrying messages to and from the forest. Once she "carried a pistol tied to her thighs near the groin." (*p.*19) She was interrogated and searched by a homeguard. As the fellow was about to touch the vital spot, she screamed and teased the fellow saying, "I'll lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother, it is so aged, and see what gain it'll bring you for the rest of your life." (*p.*19-20) She made a gesture to lift her clothes, but the fellow leaves her alone and she is let off Wambui is assigned the role of a judge to try Mugo for the latter's betrayal of Kihika. She is of the view that they "should not have tried him." (*p.*243) But, nevertheless, she feels the need "to sweep the room" and "light the fire" as she realizes how "dirt can so quickly collect in a clean hut." (*p.*243) Ngugi fulfils his commitment of historicizing marginal men and women as represented by Warui and Wambui.

6.7.3 Koina

Koina was conscripted as a cook during the Second World War. He is fiercely independent and bold. After the War, he worked in a white man's shoe factory. When he demanded better wages, a decent house and a car, he was fired. It sobered him a little. Then, he joined Dr. Lynd as a house boy. Dr. Lynd was a spinster but lived in a house which was like a mansion. Her dog had its own room in the house, with a bed and sheets and blankets! while most of his fellow countrymen went without a proper roof over their heads. He thought about all this, took the Oath to join the Kenya Land and Freedom Army and became its lieutenant He is propelled by a passion to drive away the likes of Dr. Lynd and her dogs from Kenya, a blackman's country. He leads two of his colleagues and stormes into Dr. Lynd's

home, snatches her two guns and a pistol, and leaves the place after gang-raping her with vengeance. He also kills her dog with his panga and says. "Let me never see you again in this country." But to his shock, Dr. Lynd and her dog (another one) continue to live in the post-independence Kenya as though to mock at the blackman's sense of independence.

6.7.4 General R.

It is **General R.** (Russia) under whose direction the celebrations of Uhuru are conducted at Rung'ei. He is obliged to deliver the main speech in place of Mugo. He evolves his own theory of violence and advocates the need for its use in a colonial situation.

According to Frantz Fanon, the 'race' dimension is a significant factor in addition to the class conflict in a revolutionary struggle. General R. like Fanon, lends legitimacy to violence against the oppressor, General R. justifies why they "killed and split blood." He says:

He who was not on our side, was against us. That is why we killed our black brothers. Because, inside, they were whitemen. And I know even now this war is not ended. We get Uhuru today. But what's the meaning of "Uhuru"? It is contained in the name of our Movement: Land and Freedom.....

We want a Kenya built on the heroic tradition of resistance of our people. We must revere our heroes and punish traitors and collaborators with the colonial enemy. (*p.*221)

General R. is hardened because of his parents, his harrowing experience of the white man's war, his own underground life in the forest for seven long years. He is on the look out for a sacrifice as part of the Uhuru celebrations. Consequent upon the betrayal of Kihika as confessed by Mugo himself, General pronounces: "The trial will be held tonight.....your deeds alone will condemn you." (*p.*238)

6.7.5 Gatu

Gatu is a detainee in a detention camp. He is probably the most lively character (next to Mumbi) in the novel. He provides fun and laughter in the midst of irony and suspense, tension and violence which are built into the novel. His gruesome murder in cold-blood casts a spell of gloom on the fellow detainees evoking a sense of the macabre on the one hand and empathy on the other. Gatu's sense of the history of the peoples of the world in relation to their liberation struggles in India, America, Russia and Africa is tremendous. His endless narration of stories marked by fantasy and fun and his sense of performance while telling them relieves the fellow detainees from their monotony, alienation and disgust.

He joins the Movement fairly early in life. His unflinching faith in it inspires the fresh oath seekers to whom he administers the Oath. He takes the beating and the tortures like a funeral ram. Often he would be confined in a cell alone because of his skill in "mimicking the English voices and miming their features." (*p.*108) Gatu becomes the symbol of the collective resistance to colonialism.

Gatu is a loner in the world without anybody to call his kith and kin. Yet his sense of the community is much more than those who are privileged to enjoy the warmth, comforts and the love of a family life. It is also possible for him "to laugh at himself and others." (*p.*111) He was taken away one evening, tortured and hanged in his cell. The death of Gatu thoroughly demoralises the fellow detainees. This unnerves and unsettles Ginkonyo who admits his Mau-Mau oath. Gatu's death underlines the tension between hope and human weakness.

6.7.6 Gikonyo

Gikonyo has in him the potentialities of a capitalist. He has a farm plot of five acres, a shop at Rung'ei and a lorry. On top of it all, he is the local Chairman of the Movement. He achieves all this within four years of his release from detention. The key to his success is due to a sense of application and hard work. He is aware of and very frank about the weak side of his personality. He tells Mugo praising the latter while conceding his own frailty: "I would have sold Kenya to the white man to buy my own freedom." (*p.*68) He says further "you have a great heart." (*p.*68) It is again Gikonyo who pays tributes to Mugo on the latter's confession of his guilt in public.

'He was a brave man, inside,' he said. 'He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become a Chief. Tell me another person who would have exposed his soul for all the eyes to peck at.' He paused and let his eyes linger on Mumbi. Then he looked away and said, 'Remember that few people in that meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I-we-too-in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at.' (*p.*233-34)

Gikonyo's assessment of the heroic streak in Mugo's character is highly incisive and discerning. It points out the need to indulge in self-introspection by one and all to know their weaknesses and limitations.

6.7.7 Mugo

Mugo is the most complex character in the novel. He is a fascinating person and a great betrayer at the same time. The novel in a way is a study in human nature and human psychology attempted through the psyche of Mugo. His attempt to wriggle out of a tension between his inescapable reality of loneliness and his need to return to the community – is sought to be dramatized by the novelist. According to Robson, Mugo is often "in a state of limbo, poised between the several different images he possesses - the hero, the sufferer, the betrayer, the hermit."(*p.*53) This, precisely, is the complex nature of Mugo's personality. On the one hand, he consciously attempts to be free from any involvement with others. On the other hand, he craves for the company of somebody or the other.

Mugo seems to be haunted by a desire "to kill" by strangling with his strong arms. He relishes the image of his attempt to strangle his aunt. The details of the same make one sit up and think about what sort of man Mugo is:

He would get her by the neck, strangle her with his naked hands. Give me the strength: give me the strength, god. He watched her struggle, like a fly in a spider's hands; her muffled groans and cries for mercy reached his ears. He would press harder, make her feel the power in his man's hands. Blood rushed to his finger-tips, he was breathless, acutely fascinated by the audacity and daring of his own action.(*p.*8)

He tells Mumbi that he had strangled her brother, Kihika. This is a distortion of the fact. He threatens to strangle Mumbi too and he nearly strangles her. After he shares the secret of Kihika's betrayal by him to the white man with her, he becomes hysterical and speaks incoherently, and in a flash jumps at her giving her no chance to escape. She is terrified as he "closed in on her, one hand on her mouth, the other searching her throat. She panted and whimpered horribly." (*p.*186) But Mugo comes to his senses soon and releases her from his grip.

Mugo is haunted by the burden of his guilt. Whenever anybody looks at him, he feels naked. He can not stand the anamoly of being treated as the village hero. Like Gatu, he bears his torture during his detention stoically. Unlike his fellow detainess, he has never taken any oath nor does he have anyone to return to as and when he is released. In the absence of an oath, he is more free and less bound to any cause. The irony is

that many detainees—Karanja, Gikonyo and several others confess their oath and ensure their release. His daring attempt to save Kihika's pregnant wife from being tortured becomes a living legend testifying to his humanity.

He walks to the dais like a hero and his daring admission of his betrayal of Kihika is both dramatic and anticlimatic. Following his confession, "Mugo felt light. A load of many years was lifted from his shoulders. He was free, sure, confident." (*p.*235) On seeing. Konia and General R., he says: "I am ready" (for the trial). (*p.*238) This is heroic indeed for the one who "took refuge in reticence" (*p.*66) and lived like a hermit. Eileen Julien treats Mugo as the hero of the novel and identifies him with the reader. She observes: "Mugo – in his complexity, resembles the reader.

He wants desperately to be integrated into the whole but is isolated by his crime and guilt."(*African Literature Today p.*142) Mugo's courageous confession puts most people to shame as they feel stripped naked from within. Ochola-Ojero comments: "humanity's task is to face upto the problem of shared guilt, for to err is human."(*Busara* No:2 *p.*43) Most people hang their heads in shame for Mugo and on their own behalf due to their own consciousness of their sense of betrayals, lapses and for all their misdeeds or indifference during a critical phase of their history. Thus, Mugo "is human in both the most glorious sense and in the most pathetic sense, such that his admission of his human nature is a victory – not for absolute virtue but for humanity."

6.8 CONCLUSION: *A GRAIN OF WHEAT* AS A COMPLEX PORTRAYAL OF HISTORY

Here then is Ngugi's portrayal of a traumatic phase in the history of Kenya--the so-called Mau Mau--a phase in which sections of a highly complex society comprising of people belonging to various African tribes, white settlers and Indians acted and reacted to events of violence in a highly emotionally surcharged and often contradictory manner. As P. Ochola - Ojero puts it:

> In *A Grain of Wheat* the author probes into the psychology of those characters who have undergone serious difficulties and consequent disillusionment but who during the time of emergency have found some meaning and purpose in life in the tough fight for their country's independence. ("Of Tares and Broken Handles")

However, the novel is not as has been stated by both Ochola -Ojero, and David Cook (1983:69) about the theme of betrayal alone, in which 'all are guilty'. While it may be true that most major characters have—during some stage of their respective lives—acted in a manner that may be contrary to the behaviour expected from them at that time--Mugo betrays Kihika, Gikanyo confesses the oath and Mumbi sleeps with Karanja--it cannot be held against them as 'betrayal', particularly of the cause in question, namely, the freedom struggle. Mugo, for instance, redeemed himself much before his final confession when at Rira detention camp, he is singled out by Thompson for severe beatings:

> Sometimes he would have the warders whip Mugo before the other detainees. Sometimes, in naked fury, he would snatch the whip from the warders and apply it himself. (*A Grain of Wheat* p.117)

Further, he had saved a woman--Wambuku--and many others from being beaten in the trenches.

The novel presents a very complex portrayal of the freedom struggle--the role of various sections of the society, their hopes and fears on the threshold of freedom. The

hopes of Warui, Wambui, General R and Lieutenant Koinandu, the fears of Mugo and of Karanja and the conflicting feelings of Gikonyo and Mumbi. Mixing fact with fiction--Kenyatta and Thuku with Kihika and Karanja--Ngugi creates a unique picture of the freedom struggle, which is truer than history and more imaginative than ordinary fiction.

The villagers of Thabai, represent the ordinary people of Kenya who, with all their human frailties and foibles, were forced to make compromises under terror and torture but still upheld the cause. Kihika represents the revolutionary youth who saw a basic unity in the struggle of the colonial world and who sacrificed everything for freedom. Karanja on the other hand represents the collaborationists who are basically cowards and who put self before society. Gikonyo and Mumbi, once again representing thousands of ordinary people, magnify those personal relationships that went to pieces under the Emergency through sheer physical separation for long periods. While focussing on those traumatic times which the Kenyans faced during their struggle for freedom, Ngugi also hints at the shape of things to come in independent Kenya. Although people danced and sung on the streets on the Uhuru day, showering praise on 'Jomo and Kaggia and Oginga' and although they 'recalled Waiyaki's heroic deeds', they were not unaware of their dream of independent Kenya as a Shamba for all turning sour. The way their M.P. grabs Mr. Burton's Green Hill Farm, denying Gikonyo and other villagers a chance for a cooperative farm, is symbolic of the ensuring struggle between the people and their leaders in new Kenya--a theme which Ngugi was to explore in his next novel *Petals of Blood* .

6.9 LET US SUM UP

In this chapter we have presented an evaluation of *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o as historical fiction. Evaluating it in the background of the Kenyan National Freedom Movement, we have also compared it with another novel—*Carcase for Hounds*—by another Kenyan novelist, Meja Mwangi whose text is also based on the same theme. Through a thorough analysis of various events and characters we have tried to show that Ngugi has succeeded in capturing a very complex reality or what could be called extraordinary times in the history of modern Kenya. While doing so we have also presented, with the help of relevant quotations, Ngugi's ideological standpoint of various issues relating to coloialism, nationalism, class structure of post-colonial societies and the role that various sections of the society played during the Freedom Movement.

6.10 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the character of Mugo. Do you think that he is the hero of the novel? Why?

2. The Emergency disrupted the social life of Gikonyo and Mumbi. Discuss.

3. What socio-political forces does Karanja represent in *A Grain of Wheat* ? Discuss.

4. Discuss the role played by women—as delineated in *A Grain of Wheat*—in the National Freedom struggle.

5. In what way does John Thompson represent the colonial point of view? Discuss.

6. *A Grain of Wheat* is a very complex portrayal of a significant period of Kenyan history. Discuss.

7. Based on *A.Grain of Wheat*, discuss Ngugi's world-view.

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3
A Dance of the Forests : Wole Soyinka

Block Introduction

UNIT 1
An Introduction to Nigeria and to the Yoruba World 5

UNIT 2
Wole Soyinka's Life and Works 16

UNIT 3
***A Dance of the Forests* : Summary** 29

UNIT 4
Critical Commentary on *A Dance of the Forests* 39

UNIT 5
Wole Soyinka's Major Dramatic Works 54

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This block introduces you to one of the world's foremost living dramatists, Wole Soyinka, and his play, *A Dance of the Forests*. This play is a difficult one for a number of reasons. It is set in a location that is unfamiliar to us Indians. The language is dense, poetic and at times difficult to unravel. The play is deeply infused with Yoruba myth and ritual—again myth and ritual which we do not immediately recognise. The play departs from the western tradition of the "well-made play" with its three or five act structure, its exposition, climax and denouement. The magical and the supernatural play an important role in this play.

Yes, there are difficulties, but these difficulties are not insurmountable. I have taken pains to provide a great deal of background information on Nigeria, the country of Soyinka's birth. Its geography, political economy and history are explained in great detail. Soyinka is an artist cum political activist and almost all his writings are written in protest against political injustice and corruption—the injustice and corruption that have unfortunately characterised the Nigerian political scene. Details of Nigerian politics in the five decades from the fifties to the nineties have been provided along with Soyinka's contribution to different political developments. I have also explained some crucial elements of Yoruba religion and myth. Without a certain amount of knowledge on these matters it becomes easier to understand the workings of the play.

I have dealt with with Soyinka's extremely eventful life in some detail—he is a man who does not believe in the notion of the ivory tower intellectual. For him politics and art go hand in hand. In fact it would not be an oversimplification to say that the events of his turbulent life and a number of his passionate political commitments deeply infuse his work. To know his plays without knowing his life of political activism would be an injustice.

So you will find quite a bit of material to read before you actually come to an analysis of the play. But I hope that all this information will prove useful and illuminating once you actually study the text.

I have analysed the text from a number of perspectives: the issues of Nigerian independence, the relation of tradition to history, and the relation of the individual to society. I have also analysed the peculiar structure that Soyinka evolves in this play, which as I mentioned earlier, is so different from customary structures in traditional western drama. I also deal with his characterisation, although here too differences rather than similarities with western notions of rounded and flat characters are paramount, his language, and the importance of non-verbal techniques in this play. All these elements help Soyinka create a Yoruba work that is written in a language that is not Yoruba: English. The last part of my analysis deals with the crucial question of politics, Soyinka's postcoloniality (his attitude towards colonisation and decolonisation), the charges about his possible nativism, and the charges about his obscurity.

The last unit in this block introduces you briefly to some of Soyinka's other plays so that you can get a sense of how he has developed as an artist. This section will also help you to choose more works of this wonderful writer to read.

UNIT 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO NIGERIA AND TO THE YORUBA WORLD

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 History and Politics of Nigeria
1.2 Economy of Nigeria
1.3 A Glimpse into Yoruba History
1.4 Yoruba Myth and Religion
1.5 Yoruba Art
1.6 Let Us Sum Up
1.7 Glossary
1.8 Questions
1.9 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

I shall begin by spending a little time briefly introducing the history and politics and economy of Nigeria, the homeland of Wole Soyinka, to you. A knowledge of this is essential since Soyinka's literary works have a crucial link to history and politics. His plays provide a commentary, often ironic, on past or contemporary events in Nigerian history and politics and suggest possible alternative modes of operation. This unit also includes a look at the main elements of Yoruba myth and religion. Soyinka's plays are replete with Yoruba mythological figures and without some preliminary knowledge of Yoruba myth and religion, you will feel lost. This unit ends with a look at Yoruba art and the way in which Soyinka distinguishes it from western artistic modes.

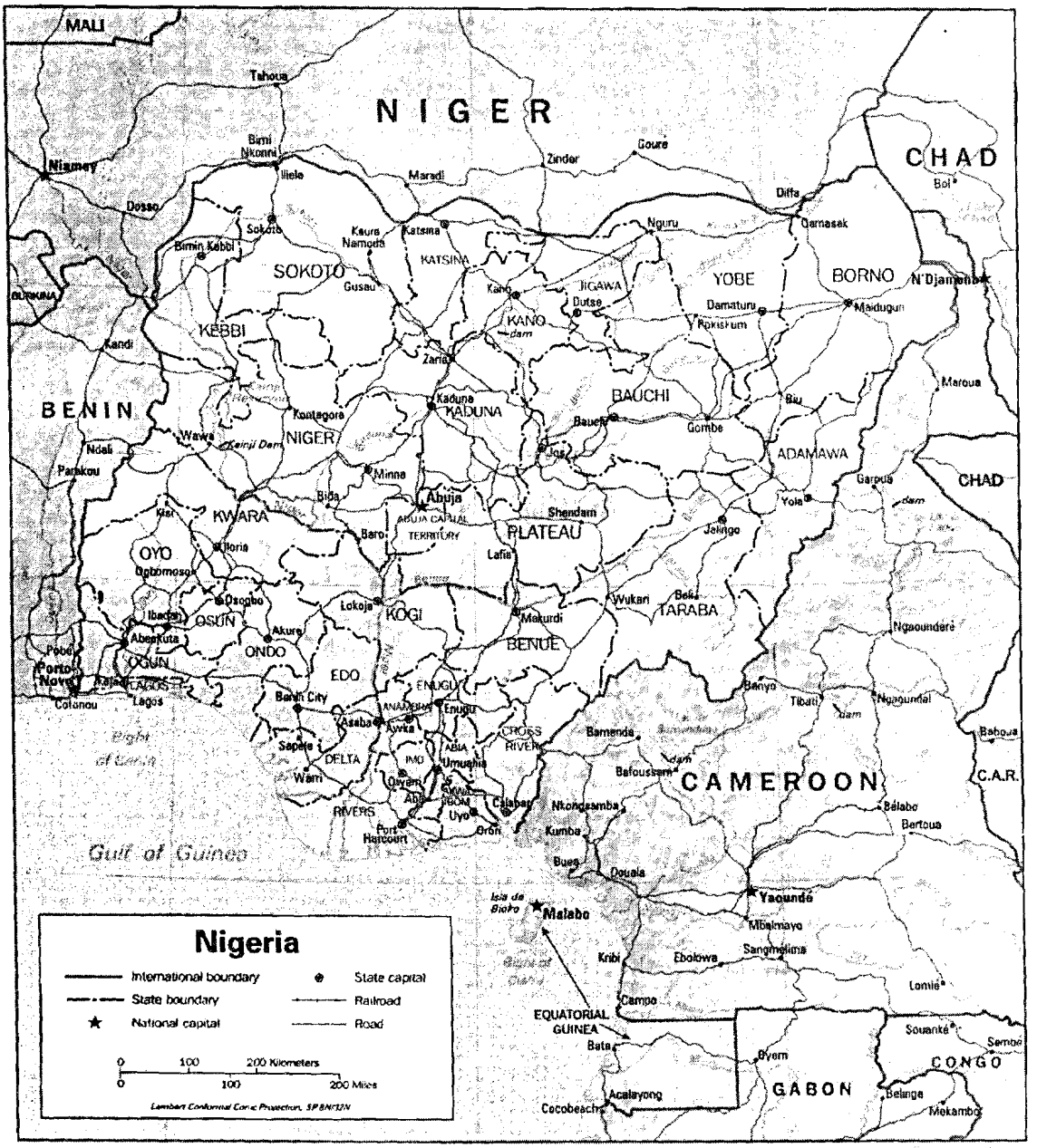
1.1 HISTORY AND POLITICS OF NIGERIA

Nigeria is a federal republic in Western Africa that was formerly a British dependency. Nigeria became an independent member of the Commonwealth of Nations in 1960. The following year it was joined by the northern part of the British Cameroons, a United Nations trust territory. In 1963 Nigeria adopted a republican constitution but retained its Commonwealth membership. It might be appropriate to keep in mind what Wole Soyinka observes in a 1993 interview:

> When did Nigeria as a nation come into being? And how did it come into being? Nigeria was an artificial creation, and it was a creation which did not take into consideration either the wishes *or* the will *or* the interests of the people who were enclosed within that boundary. They were lumped together. So, the genesis of Nigeria, as with many African countries, is very flawed. (Maja-Pearce 153)

Western Nigeria is a complex of powerful city states and the first of these is Ife. According to Yoruba mythology it is the centre of the universe. Its ruler, Oni, remains an important figure in Yoruba religion. Oyo challenged Ife's supremacy and became more powerful in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 1830s the new city

states of Ibadan and Abeokuta were founded as civil war became endemic. (Soyinka has been closely associated with all these states.) In the 1890s the British declared a protectorate over Western Nigeria. Wars and slave trade continued.



Since it was formed by the decisions of the European powers Nigeria was an unnatural creation. It has more than 300 languages although English is the official language. The various linguistic groups naturally have different political, economic, social and religious traditions, much as in the various states and union territories of India. The nations and polities within Nigeria range from the small to the large. The largest of Nigeria's so-called nations are Hausa, Fulami, Kanuri and Tiv in the north, Yoruba and Edo in the south-west and Ijaw, Ibibio and Ibo in the south-east. Of these, Hausa and Fulami have been Muslim for centuries.

The Yoruba and Edo peoples organised themselves into powerful kingdoms, some of which existed before 1000 A.D. In the state of Ife, over eight centuries ago the Yoruba produced some of the world's finest art. The most successful and complex Yoruba kingdom was Oyo, which dominated vast areas before its fall in the nineteenth century. Smaller but nonetheless powerful states succeeded Oyo and

some of these, such as Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu and Lagos, continued to function with British support even after colonisation. For example, in the kingdom of Benin, the rival of Oyo and the centre of the Edo speakers, the wishes of the king were still law to the hundreds of thousands of inhabitants when the British took over the city. Yoruba and Edo had extremely complex religions which permeated through all levels of the society. Despite the work of the Christian missionaries, the traditional religion of Benin and Yorubaland claimed the support of millions. The impact of these traditional religions and myths may be sharply felt in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*.

Now for a little of Nigeria's recent history. In 1966 the army intervened in an attempt to create a unitary government but the regional rivalries deepened. The following year the Igbo officers from Eastern Nigeria declared the secessionist republic of Biafra. This was followed by three years of warfare in which the federal government of General Yakuba Gowon liquidated Biafrian independence. Gowon tried to prevent future secession by enlarging the number of regional states to twelve (these were increased to nineteen in 1976) but the government lost the people's support because it was so hungry for power. In 1975, Gowon was toppled by a coup led by Brigadier Murtala Ramat Muhammad. The change was short-lived: the following year Murtala was assassinated. The army continued in power under General Olusegun Obasanjo who instituted measures to restore Nigeria to civilian rule. As a means to this end multiparty elections were held in 1979. These led to the formation of the second republic under President Alhaji Shehu Shagari. In mid 1983 Shagari won a second term. The revenues generated by the 1970s oil boom were drying up due to, as most people believed, flagrant corruption and mismanagement. In a 1993 interview Soyinka said that Shagari's "reign" from 1979 to 1983 was a "disaster....a zero, a minus" (Maja-Pearce 151). By the end of 1983, the second republic was replaced by a military regime under Major General Muhammad Buhari. Buhari promised that the new Federal Military Government (FMG) would end corruption and strengthen the economy. The currency was devalued, government jobs were cut back and university budgets trimmed. These measures were seen as harsh and they alienated workers, students and the middle class. The immediate expulsion of 700,000 aliens as a result of an order in March 1985 caused friction between Nigeria and other African countries. Moreover, in early 1985, the FMG had issued two divisive ordinances that were bound to be seen as autocratic, unfair and curbing the freedom of the people: the first--criticism of public officials was determined a criminal act and the second--the government could imprison "subversives" without trial.

Not surprisingly Buhari was replaced in a military coup by General Ibrahim Babangida, the leader of the dissenting members of the FMG, and who now promised, like his predecessors, to return Nigeria to civilian rule by 1992. He had the tough task of grappling with Nigeria's deepening economic chaos--a debt of $25 billion to begin with--for which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank promised assistance after protracted and complicated negotiations.

Under Babangida the style rather than the structure of the military government changed. Babangida promised leniency towards dissenters, he repealed the two offending ordinances of Buhari mentioned above and he released more than a hundred political prisoners. He continued to cut back on government expenditure but he diverted more funds to agriculture. He also put into motion the regulation of the monetary currency, the *naira*. Babangida's first few months in power were eased by a slight improvement in the economy, but many of Nigeria's old problems remained. The most critical of these were a) a continued dependence on oil exports, b) existing corruption at all levels, c)overpopulation, particularly in the cities, d) numerous conflicting ethnic groups and e) the friction between the two main

religious systems, Islam and Christianity, although both are replete with Yoruba influences in the way they are practised.

In December 1985 there was an attempted coup by Babangida's friend General Maman Vatsa. In 1986 student disturbances erupted. They began at Ahmadu Bello University and were quelled only after forty persons were killed and twenty campuses closed. Anti-police riots erupted in Lagos. Student protests continued at universities over the FMG's withdrawal of fuel subsidies. The escalation of violence, student protests and the action of workers and religious zealots threatened Babangida's regime and prevented it from fulfilling its plans of a return to civilian rule in 1992. A new decentralised civil service structure was built and in March 1988 elections for the local government councils were held. Plans for the second stage of transition to a civil government were drawn up. In April 1988 elections were held for members of the Constituent Assembly responsible for drafting the new constitution. The FMG based its plans on an improved economy on loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the continuation of a unified government with minimal corruption *under* the broad military command structure.

I have given these details because Soyinka is a writer with a very strong social commitment. He has taken a strong and outspoken stand on many of the political shortcomings of the various military regimes as you will see from the description of his life in Unit 2.

1.2 ECONOMY OF NIGERIA

Nigeria is one of the African states with the most complex, diverse and potentially strong economies, in spite of the shocks resulting from the decline in oil sales. The traditional sector provides enough of the staple foods to keep imports at a minimum. The soils of Southern Nigeria are among the most fertile in the continent. The land in the north is enough for grain, cotton, and peanut cultivation. The drought of the 1970's caused severe damage only to a few districts because of effective water conservation. Thus it seems that many of Nigeria's ills come from corrupt politicians and autocratic military regimes rather than any radical shortage of natural or human resources.

1.3 A GLIMPSE INTO YORUBA HISTORY

From a general discussion of Nigeria I want to move on to a more specific discussion of the Yoruba, the Nigerian ethnic group to which Soyinka belongs, and its history and culture.

The Yoruba is one of the largest ethnic groups of Nigeria. There are approximately fifteen million Yoruba people in south-west Nigeria and the neighbouring Benin and Togo. They are loosely linked by geography, language, history and religion. Most of them live within the borders of the tropical forest belt, but remnants of the powerful Oyo kingdom include groups that live at the fringes of the northern Savanna grasslands. Archaeological evidence suggests that the ancestors of the Yoruba may have lived in this same general area of Africa since prehistoric times. In the mid eighteenth century the slave traders sent slaves of Yoruba descent to the Americas. Some of them resettled in Cuba and Brazil where elements of Yoruba culture and language can still be found.

Traditional Yoruba city states were never single political organisations. They were sub-divided into over twenty-five complex, centralized kingdoms. Of these Ile-Ife is universally recognised as the most senior and the most important Yoruba city. It was founded around 850 A.D. Its rival was the Oyo kingdom to the north-west which was founded around 1350 A.D. The Oni of Ife and the Alafin of Oyo were the most highly respected Yoruba kings in Nigeria (the latter appears in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*). The other major kingdoms were the Ijesha and the Ekiti in the north-east; the Shabe, the Ketu, the Egbado, the Ijebu and the Awori in the south-west; and the Oado, the Owo, the Itsekiri in the south-east.

For centuries the Yoruba lived in large, densely populated cities which were able to practice special trades. Most of the people commuted to the countryside for part of the year to raise the staple crops--yams, corn, cassava, cocoa (they produced 90% of the cocoa for Nigeria)--on family farms. The economy is structured around agriculture, trade, and handicrafts. Women do not normally work outside the home. They attain social status through their role in the market system rather than through their husband's economic status. Each city-state maintains its own interpretation of history and religious traditions and its unique art style, yet all acknowledge the ritual sovereign of Ife, all consult Yoruba herbalists and divination priests, and all honour the pantheon of Yoruba gods.

The Yoruba towns were either farm-oriented or were located at the crossroads of the trade routes where traders stopped to rest. In most towns the market place was usually located in front of the king's palace in the centre of the town. The towns were founded by Baale (father of the land) who in turn was named king. He was the religious and political leader of the town. It was his job to name the chiefs, Otun, the king's right-hand man and Balogun, the war chief. The king was considered a sacred being, like a living god. He could not be seen or spoken to directly. He could not eat in public. People believed that he did not die--he merely passed on his crown to another Yoruba.

1.4 YORUBA MYTH AND RELIGION

There are a number of conflicting and confusing elements in Yoruba religion. The variety and lack of homogeneity is a result of the differences in religion between the different city-states and even villages. The same deity may be male in one village and female in another. The trickster god may have three different names within the same village. Also, certain elements of other religions, particularly Islam and Christianity also account for the variety.

The structure of Yoruba religion is that of "diffuse monotheism," as one scholar puts it, although given the number of Yoruba gods this does not seem to be a very helpful suggestion. The scholar probably hailed from the west and was trying to simplify Yoruba religion for western consumption. To a person living in India the plethora of Yoruba gods should sound very familiar. Obatala and Olorun/Olodumare/Edumare seem to be the most important gods, the first the god of creation, the second a supreme deity who breathes life into creation. There exist also several hundred lower gods. The pantheon of deities is called the Orisha or Orishala. It is referred to in both the singular and plural. In the oral tradition, there is a tale of the high god or 'Supreme deity' as Soyinka terms it, variously called Olorun or Olodumare or Edumare, asking the Orishala to descend from the sky to create the first earth at Ile-Ife. Orishala was delayed and his younger brother (some say his wife) Ododuwa, accomplished the task. Later sixteen other Orishala came down from the heavens to

create human beings and live on earth. The descendants of each of these deities is said to have spread Yoruba culture and religious principles throughout the rest of Yorubaland. Sometimes Olorun and Orishala/Obatala are seen as one and the same. Obatala is the god of creation, often a sculptor god who has the responsibility to shape human bodies. Physically deformed humans are supposed to be either his votaries or the victims of his displeasure. Olorun/Olodumare/Edumare reserves the right to breathe life into these bodies. Soyinka concludes that the "art of Obatala is thus essentially plastic and formal" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 140n). Soyinka does not find the concept of Obatala very inspiring. "The unblemished god, Obatala," he writes, "is the serene womb of chthonic reflections (or memory), a passive strength awaiting and celebrating each act of vicarious restoration of his primordial being....His beauty is enigmatic, expressive only of the resolution of plastic healing through the wisdom of acceptance. Obatala's patient suffering is the well-known aesthetics of the saint" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 143). Rather than Obatala, it is Ogun who sets the springs of tragedy in motion. But more of that when I discuss Ogun.

The basic pantheon of Yoruba gods is variously estimated at 201, 401, 601 or more. Some of these divinities are primordial, having existed when either Obatala or Oduduwa was creating the earth. Others are heroes, both male and female, who left an abiding impression on the people. Some of the divinities may also be natural phenomena--mountains, hills, rivers--that have influenced people's lives and history. The most popular gods are Sango or Shango (the god of thunder and lightning), Ifa or Orunmila (the god of divination), Eshu or Ishu (the messenger and trickster god), Ogun (the god of iron and of war), Olokun (the god of the sea), Shokpona (the god of the earth) and Oko (the god of agriculture). Fa or Fate is the hidden companion of the gods and of humans.

There is a continuity between the divinities, the kings and the ancestors. The two major gods are Oduduwa and Sango or Shango. They are also believed to have had human forms and to have reigned in Ife and Oyo respectively. The Yoruba still refer to themselves as the children of Oduduwa. Sango or Shango creates thunder and lightning by casting "thunderstones" down to earth. The Yoruba believe that these stones have special powers. Sango/Shango is said to have four wives, each of whom is represented by a major Nigerian river. The chief wife, Oya, is represented by the Niger.

Olorun ("the owner of the sky") or Olodumare/Edumare ("the almighty") is never actively worshipped. Unlike Sango/Shango, Olorun has no shrines and no priests and asks for no sacrifices. Although Olorun/Olodumare/Edumare is much akin to the Judeo-Christian creator of all things, the giver of life and the final judge, the Yoruba ignore him in their day-to-day lives. Some scholars conjecture that Olorun/Olodumare/Edumare may have developed through the influence of Islam and Christianity, as a simulacrum of the gods of those religions. The Yoruba possibly find the concept of an almighty god so overwhelming and remote that they cannot relate Olorun/Olodumare/Edumare to their quotidian reality.

Another important deity is Ogun, the god of war, of the hunt and of iron. *A Dance of the Forests* is the only play of Soyinka's in which Ogun makes an appearance. In Yoruba religion and myth, he serves as a patron deity of blacksmiths, warriors and all who use metal in their work. He also presides over deals and contracts. In Yoruba courts people swear to tell the truth by kissing the machete sacred to Ogun. He also stands for courage in battle and the spirit of pioneering, and he brings good luck to hunters. The Yoruba consider Ogun fearsome and terrible in revenge. If one breaks a pact in his name, swift retribution will follow. However, as Soyinka points out, Ogun's justice is "transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative," whereas

Sango/Shango's justice is "primarily retributive" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 141). Legend has it that the Orisha were trying to carve a road through the forest. Of the Orisha only Ogun could accomplish the task because only he had the proper implements. Thus he should have been the king of the Orisha, but since he did not care for the position it went to Obatala. Some versions of the Yoruba religion combine Ogun with the trickster god Eshu. Ogun is associated with both creation and destruction and Ogun festivals include animal sacrifices and processions marked by metal-tipped palm fronds to please or to appease him.

Ogun seems to be a particular favourite of Soyinka's. In terms of Hellenic values he sees Ogun as a combination of the Dionysian, the Apollonian and the Promethean "virtues." To Soyinka, Ogun is, in many ways, the "first artist and technician of the forge," a creature who "evokes Nietzsche's Apollonian spirit,a 'massive impact of image, concept, ethical doctrine and sympathy.' Obatala is the placid essence of creation; Ogun the creative urge and instinct, the essence of creativity" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 141). We may recall that Prometheus, son of Iapetus, was the figure in Greek mythology who in one version of the creation myth, formed humans in the likeness of gods, using the clay and water of Panopeus in Phocis (Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* 1:34). Prometheus was also believed to have stolen fire from the gods to give to the mortals and was punished by Zeus for his pains. Soyinka sees Ogun as "the first actor--for he led the others...(the) first suffering deity, the first creative energy, the first challenger, and conqueror of transition. And his, the first art, was tragic art..." (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 145). In an interview he says that he found Ogun not just a warrior but a creative influence, "by implication the father of poetry", and very liberating, "having grown up in a narrow form of Christianity" ("Wole Soyinka on Yoruba Religion").

Significantly, the Yoruba pantheon has no evil gods. The trickster god, Eshu, is merely mischievous. Legend has it that posing as a merchant he once sold magnificent gifts to a man's two wives. The ensuing battle for the husband's favour tore the family apart. Eshu is also the guardian of houses and villages. In this role he is called "Baba" or father (the same as in Hindi or Bengali). Eshu is also the god of Ifa, a sophisticated and complex divinatory tool, some call it a form of writing, which uses nuts, signs, and increasing squares of the number four to predict the future. Geoffrey Parrinder claims that Ifa is "the only instance of writing practised in modern times" among the non-Christian and non-Islamic peoples. It has remained enormously popular till today.

Festivals are an integral part of Yoruba life. The three main celebrations take place in July (in honour of Ifa), in September (in honour of Orun) and in January. The last is called Bere and is the most important festival. It marks the end of harvest time. In all the festivals, processions and performances take place, but in the Bere festival, the fields are ritualistically set alight to celebrate and illuminate the fruits of the soil. The Yoruba New Year takes place in March, when the villages and towns take part in communal purification rites, helping each other to confess their sins and starting the new year afresh together. Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* is modelled on this New Year festival.

The Yoruba treat their ancestors with great respect, which is only to be expected in a culture with only oral records of the past. Anthropologists debate whether the rituals dealing with ancestry are religious in nature or simply a mark of respect. At least a few Yoruba tribes believe that their ancestors become demi-gods after death, but only once they have assumed the persona of the true deity. This belief resembles another facet of Yoruba faith--the phenomenon of possession--in which mediums take on the characteristics of one or another of the gods. The characteristics of some of the main gods are so well known that mediums as far off as Haiti can loll back

their heads and cross their legs in the same way when possessed by, say, Sango/Shango the lightning god. The earth is seen as the home of the ancestors' remains. When offerings are made to earth they also become offerings to the ancestors to make them comfortable in their new home. The dead ancestors are thus viewed as religiously significant and close to the earth.

Wole Soyinka describes the Yoruba religion as a "liberating" one because it is so open to other religions and so tolerant of them. "The Oba would go to a mosque even if he was a Christian," he says. "Traditional religion is not only accomodating, it is liberating because whenever a new phenomenon impinged on the consciousness of the Yoruba...they do not bring down the barriers--close the doors....They do not consider it a hostile experience. That's why the corpus of Ifa is constantly reinforced and augmented....You have Ifa verses which deal with Islam, you have Ifa verses which deal with Christianity." For example, the myth of Moremi who sacrificed the only son to save the town has clear parallels with the story of Jesus. Soyinka claims that the Yoruba "had no hostility to the piety of other people" because they had the ability to see other beliefs as other systems and not as "pagan" or "kafir" or superstitious mumbo-jumbo. Soyinka is implying that Islam and Christianity do not possess the same tolerance towards other religions as does the Yoruba faith. We in India can see a link between Soyinka's view of Yoruba religion and the words of Ramakrishna Paramhansa who said all religions are but different paths to the same godhead. (Significantly, in the passage I quote from Geoffrey Parrinder above, the word "pagan" is used, but I have substituted in my paraphrase the more tolerant description "non-Christian.") Soyinka terms all religions as "metaphors for the strategy of man coping with the vast unknown."

1.5 YORUBA ART

The Yoruba were famous for their art and craft. Their wood sculpture remains famous to this day. Everything in this society is carved out of wood: doors, drums, ritual masks. The doors are often covered with carved panels of scenes of everyday life, of history or of mythology. Even the hinge posts are carved with figures, making them look like totem poles. The masks are simple facial carvings that represent different types of Yoruba society--the trader, the servant or the seducer.

In *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), Soyinka writes, "Yoruba traditional art is not ideational...but 'essential.' It is not the idea (in religious arts) that is transmitted into wood or interpreted in music or movement, but a quintessence of inner being, a symbolic interaction of the many aspects of revelations (within a universal context) with their moral apprehension" (141).

About Yoruba music Soyinka says that it tries to return to the roots of language and expression. Words are not seen as alien to music: the "nature of Yoruba music is intensively the nature of its language and poetry, highly charged, symbolic, myth-embryonic....In cult funerals, the circle of initiate mourners, an ageless swaying grove of dark pines, raises a chant around a mortar of fire, and words are taken back to their roots, to their original poetic sources when fusion was total and the movement of words was the very passage of music and the dance of images" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 147).

Both religious ritual and music play a large part in the creation of Yoruba drama,.as Soyinka evocatively explains in *Myth, Literature and the African World.* Soyinka links the birth of Yoruba drama to the Ogun mysteries. No "copying of actuality" or straightforward mimesis of the seen world is required here. Yoruba theatre,

particularly Yoruba tragedy springs from what Soyinka terms a sense of transition, a transition from the immortal to the mortal. However, the "element of eternity which is the gods' prerogative" is not sensed as something exclusive to the gods or excessively remote from human experience as in the Christian world view. The Yoruba concept of time being, as I understand it, not exclusively linear or teleological, accounts for what Soyinka terms "contemporaneous existence." To the Yoruba, "present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 143-4). And these manifestations are contained in a vital, living way rather than in the form of diffuse abstractions. These concepts will become a little easier to understand once we look at the way they are realised in *A Dance of the Forests.*

Soyinka describes Yoruba tragedy as being "the anguish" of the "severance" between gods and mortals. He calls this "the fragmentation of essence from self" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 145). The music of tragedy is "the stricken cry of man's blind soul as he flounders in the void and crashes through a deep abyss of a-spirituality and cosmic rejection. Tragic music is an echo from that void; the celebrant speaks, sings and dances in authentic archetypal images....All understand and respond, for it is the language of the world" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 145).

It is important to realise that the anthropomorphic gods are in no way seen as remote--the Yoruba thus feel free to indulge in "camaraderie and irreverence" when they speak of the gods. The Yoruba religion stresses "the innate humanity of the gods themselves, their bond with man through a common animist relation with nature and phenomena" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 145).

Soyinka has spoken of Yoruba drama and its links with religious ritual from a philosophical viewpoint. In *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), the writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o speaks of the roots of African drama in more material terms. According to Ngugi, African drama springs from many different sources:

a) harvest rituals, such as the rite to bless the magic power of tools

b) fertility rites and ceremonies which "celebrate life oozing from the earth, or from between the thighs of humans and animals" (36)

c) ceremonies to bless spears, warriors and other defenders of the community. These songs and dances would act out battle scenes. They had a story and a chorus to underline the fate of evil doers, thieves and idlers.

d) rituals to mark the different stages of life, such as the ceremonies for birth, circumcision, marriage and burial of the dead. These rituals could appease the occasionally hard-hearted gods who were represented in these rituals by men in masks. People came to believe that "Nature, through works and ceremony, could be turned into a friend" (36).

Some of the dramas could take weeks, even months to be performed. The Ithika in Kenya which is held every twenty-five years takes six months to perform.

In pre-colonial Africa, drama was not an isolated event, according to Ngugi. It was an essential part of the "rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community" (37). Often it drew its energy from other activities. It provided entertainment as well as "moral instruction." Even more than this it was "a strict matter of life and death and communal survival." It could take place anywhere, not necessarily on stage.

For Ngugi the "real language" of African theatre can be found in "the struggles of the oppressed," the struggles which give birth to "a new Africa" (60). "The peasants and workers of Africa," Ngugi continues, "are making a tomorrow out of the present of toil and turmoil." The theatre which uses this language will find a response not only "in the hearts and minds of the participants" but also "in the hearts of those living outside the immediate environment of its physical being and operation" (60) i.e., in urban African audiences or in non-African audiences.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

Nigeria was originally a British dependency; it became independent in 1960. It is an artificial creation where people of conflicting religions and ethnicities were forced to live together. Yoruba is one of the largest ethnic groups of Nigeria, loosely linked by geography, language, history and religion, and it is the group to which Soyinka belongs. The structure of Yoruba religion has two supreme gods, Obatala and Olorun, the creator and the breather of life, as well as a number of important other gods such as Ogun and Eshu. Ogun, the god of war, of the hunt and of iron is Soyinka's favourite. He represents to Soyinka, the struggle of the artist to create. Soyinka describes the Yoruba religion as tolerant and accomodating. There is a close relation between mortals, ancestors and the gods. The gods are not seen as evil or distant from mortals. According to Soyinka, Yoruba tragedy springs from the anguish that comes about as a result of the mortal's separation from the immortal. Yoruba people feel free to laugh at their gods and be irreverent about them. Festivals are very important in Yoruba religion. Drama came from these festivals and rites, such as harvest festivals and fertility rites, and ceremonies such as those to bless warriors. *A Dance of the Forests* is modelled on the Yoruba New Year festival. Soyinka describes Yoruba art as "essential" in that it expresses "the quintessence of inner being."

1.7 GLOSSARY

monotheism:	doctrine that there is only one god
Dionysian:	of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, suggesting the power of emotion, or a lack of intellectual control
Apollonian:	of Apollo, the Greek god of the sun, suggesting intellectual control
Promethean:	like Prometheus, a character in Greek mythology, who, in one myth, formed humans in the likeness of gods, and in another myth was supposed to have stolen fire from the gods to give man

1.8 QUESTIONS

Q.1. Why is Nigeria an "artificial creation"?

Q.2. What, according to Soyinka, is the link between Yoruba religion and Yoruba tragedy?

Q.3. Write a short note on Yoruba religion.
Q.4. What are all the different things Ogun represents to the Yoruba people and why is he Soyinka's favourite god?

1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 WOLE SOYINKA'S LIFE AND WORK

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Wole Soyinka's Early Life and Works
2.2 The Fifties
2.3 The Sixties
2.4 The Seventies
2.5 The Early Eighties
2.6 The Late Eighties and Nineties
2.7 Let Us Sum Up
2.8 Glossary
2.9 Questions
2.10 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

We now move on to Wole Soyinka's life and his work. Along with biographical details this unit also mentions Soyinka's literary output so one gets the sense of the way in which his literary career unfolds. Contemporary developments in Nigerian politics are also mentioned because as stated earlier, politics is what Soyinka's work



springs from, and changes in the political situation affect both his life and his work. For example, he has to seek political asylum in the United States and this in turn affects the way he writes about Nigeria in his work. All three, his life, his work, and Nigerian politics, must be seen as a totality and not as separate elements.

2.1 WOLE SOYINKA'S EARLY LIFE AND WORKS

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka (pronounced Shoy-ING-ka) was the second child of Samuel Ayodele and Grace Eniola Soyinka. He was born on the 13th of July, 1934. He spent his childhood in Abeokuta, on the Ogun river, in Western Nigeria. From 1954 to 1959 he was in England studying at the University of Leeds and then later in London, working. In 1960 he returned to Nigeria to do research, write and direct plays. Since the '60s he has published novels, poetry, autobiography, plays which have established his international reputation. He visited Europe and America frequently and finally moved to the latter to escape tyrannical political regimes in Nigeria. In 1986 he won the Nobel Prize for literature. Today, he is known as one of the foremost African writers, having written around twenty books in such various genres as drama, poetry, novels, autobiography, memoirs, criticism and political commentary.

Chronological List of Wole Soyinka's Major Works (genre in parenthesis only if not mentioned in title)

A Dance of the Forests 1963 (play)
The Lion and the Jewel 1963 (play)
The Swamp Dwellers 1963 (play)
Before the Blackout 1965 (play)
The Interpreters 1965 (novel)
The Road 1965 (play)
'Idanre' and Other Poems 1967
Kongi's Harvest 1967 (play)
The Trials of Brother Jero 1969 (play)
Madmen and Specialists 1972 (play)
The Man Died 1972 (prison notes)
A Shuttle in the Crypt 1972 (poetry)
Bacchae of Euripides: a Communion Rite 1973 (dramatic adaptation)
Camwood on the Leaves 1973 (play)
Season of Anomy 1973 (novel)
Death and the King's Horseman 1975 (play)
Myth, Literature and the African World 1976 (non-fiction)
Ake: The Years of Childhood 1981 (autobiography)
Opera Wonyosi 1981 (play)
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A Play of Giants 1984 (play)
Requiem for a Futurologist 1985 (play)
Isara: A Voyage Around Essay 1990 (autobiography)
Mandela's Earth and Other Poems 1990
A Scourge of Hyacinths 1992 (play)
From Zia, With Love 1992 (play)
Art, Dialogue, and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture 1993
The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis 1996
Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness 1999

2.2 THE FIFTIES

Family, Birth, Childhood and Early Education: From the first volume of Soyinka's autobiography, *Ake* (1981), we learn of his Yoruba parents and the place he lived in, Ake, in the Abeokura region. **At this time Nigeria was still a British**

dependency. His father, Samuel Ayodele, was a teacher and later a headmaster of a school. His mother, Grace Eniola, dubbed "wild Christian" in Ake, was born into the large and influential Egba family which pioneered the spread of Christianity through Western Nigeria. They were also well-known for composing music which fused the Yoruba and European traditions. His great grandfather, the Rev. J.J. Ransome-Kuti, was politically inclined, and in 1905 became famous for preaching at St. Paul's Cathedral. Soyinka's uncle was a public figure and his aunt was for many years a leading figure in the women's movement in Nigeria.

His mother was a huge influence on Soyinka. She was a teacher, a performer and a political activist; she also ran a shop opposite Alake's palace. She made sure that her son was exposed to all aspects of the Yoruba life as well as being aware of politics in the larger world outside. (Ake had been a major base for European colonial activities in Western Nigeria since 1842.) There was quite a contrast between the life in Ake and the society of Soyinka's father's home town, Isara, in the Ijebu region. Isara was relatively isolated from the Christian influence and the people there had little contact with white traders, and so the Yoruba influence, both culturally and spiritually, was marked.

Soyinka, like other Yorubas, has three names: Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka. A Yoruba child is born with one name, "Amutorunwa," christened with a second, "Abiso," and has an attributive name, "Oriki." In Soyinka's case, "Olu," used as a compound in Oluwole, originally belonged to a child of high or princely birth. "Akin," in Akinwande means strength or the strong one. Soyinka's parents' adherence to the traditional naming procedure suggests the traditional base of their family. Predictably, perhaps partly as a result of his mother's family's political influence and Christian religion, Soyinka went to St. Peter's Primary School rather than a local Yoruba school. He also spent a year in the grammar school of which his great uncle was in charge.

In 1946 he entered the elite government college at Ibadan, the capital of Western Nigeria. He wrote sketches for the college drama group and won prizes for the poems he recited at the arts festivals. In 1950 he passed his School Certificate examination and went to work as a clerk in Lagos. He read his short stories on the national radio and from then moved on to pioneering Nigerian radio drama.

In October 1952 Soyinka entered the newly-established University College at Ibadan. There he read English, Greek and History. He was extremely active in a number of student activities outside the classroom. He played the lead in a number of theatre productions. He co-founded the fraternity "The Pyrates" and edited the student publication, *The Eagle*. Along with his academic work he continued his creative writing.

After passing the Intermediate Arts examination Soyinka went to the University of Leeds in October 1954. While working for an Honours degree in the School of English, he had G. Wilson Knight, the famous Shakespearean scholar, as his teacher. Wilson Knight was also active in directing a number of classical and modern plays with the students. While at Leeds Soyinka acted with the university theatre group and had his short stories published in the student literary magazine. His interests varied from singing in a rag revue to politics. He was particularly conscious of any racist behaviour. In 1957 he was awarded an upper second class Honours degree.

This period is crucial as being the period of his literary apprenticeship. He drafted two important plays, *The Swamp Dwellers*, a sombre play where the protagonist is caught between the poisonous old order of the rotten swamp and the soulless new order of urban life, and *The Lion and the Jewel*, one of the most sparkling and

successful of his early plays. The latter was read on behalf of the Royal Court Theatre, in Sloane Square, London, and the young playwright was invited to be a part of the activities of the Royal Court Theatre as a script reader.

In 1958 Soyinka moved to London where he taught, did broadcasts and wrote. The theatre was very much a part of his life. Under the leadership of whom he would later call "that remarkable theatre-manager George Devine," Soyinka was introduced to the early work of the innovative and experimental playwrights John Osborne, Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker, N. F. Simpson, John Arden and Harold Pinter who were later to become icons, as well as the work of those he called "stylistic and ideological pariahs:" Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht (Maja-Pearce 2). He directed a group called the Nigeria Drama Group in a production of *The Swamp Dwellers* in December 1958 as part of the annual Univeristy of London Drama Festival. In February 1959 both *The Swamp Dwellers*_ and *The Lion and the Jewel* were produced at the Arts Theatre, Ibadan, to an enthusiastic audience. Also in 1959 Soyinka composed a song against British colonial violence in Kenya. In November 1959 he directed "An Evening" of his own work in the theatre where plays like *The Invention*, a satire about how an accidental missile explosion eliminates the dark pigment in African skin, were performed. Soyinka was becoming more and more agitated about racism, about apartheid and increasingly interested in the techniques employed by Black American playwrights and fiction writers to deal with the issue of racism. It was at this time that he was gradually evolving into a playwright who employs the idiom of African art to write plays in English, plays that respond to contemporary events, plays that are highly politically conscious, without being mere propaganda pieces.

2.3 THE SIXTIES

In 1960, hearing that Nigeria was to become independent, Soyinka returned to Nigeria. From 1960 to 1962 he was travelling all over the country on a Rockefeller Foundation grant in order to study the traditional drama of Western Africa. This was an enormously fruitful and productive time. As he travelled Soyinka studied the extended dramatic structure of the Yoruba religious rituals and the festival performances. The harvest festivals, the initiation ceremonies, the rites for the dead, all these involved community participation in highly structured rituals that extended over days or even weeks. These rituals used music, dance, masquerade and symbolic acts to link living and unseen forces. We can see the influence of these dramatic rituals in *A Dance of the Forests* and other plays. It is also important to note that Soyinka imbibed the dramatic structure of these ritual performances, a structure that incorporated elements like the masquerade and the play-within-a-play, songs and dances. This sort of structure was quite different from the shapes of plays belonging to the western theatre tradition, particularly the classical tradition, which he had studied and seen performed in England.

At this time Soyinka was also attached to the English department at the University of Ibadan. He had friends in the radio and television business as well as among editors of journals looking for Nigerian writers. Soyinka joined and became the leader of this community of artists and young, creative people. In 1960 *The Swamp Dwellers* was broadcast along with two new radio plays, *Camwood on the Leaves* and *The Tortoise*. Soyinka also took part in radio talks and discussions. He wrote a T.V. play called *My Father's Burden*, and a stage play, a one-act farce, called *The Trials of Brother Jero*. All the plays were produced and, in fact, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, a satire on the Bar Beach sects at Lagos and the story of a wily religious charlatan who outwits his disciples and creditors, has remained one of Soyinka's most popular plays.

Soyinka formed a group called "1960 Masks" with some friends ***who were*** experienced amateur performers. In 1960, in Lagos and Ibadan, *A Dance of the Forests,* the play in our syllabus, was produced by this group. ***This was a revised*** version of an earlier anti-apartheid play called *The Dance of the African Forest*. In this production Soyinka played the role of Forest Father. This, the group's first stage production, was addressed to Nigeria at the time of Nigeria's independence (October 1, 1960). In this play Soyinka deliberately challenged Nigerians' expectations concerning their country's future in the political sphere. In the field of aesthetics, he challenged his compatriots' assumptions about the form taken by Nigerian theatre written in English.

While the play is undoubtedly complex and confusing, it established Soyinka as the enfant terrible of African theatre. He was seen as a writer who delighted in shocking, unsettling and confusing his audience, an independent thinker, an ambitious playwright, one who set out to pillage and combine, often uncomfortably, both Yoruba and western dramatic traditions, and a man of undoubted theatrical skills. The relationship between Soyinka and the Nigerian public remained ambivalent, however. This is something I shall examine in greater detail later.

In 1961 Soyinka wrote scripts for a popular weekly radio series called *Broke-Time Bar.* He tried to introduce hard-hitting social and political comment, and this was not very well-received. Soyinka ceased to write for the series--this was one of his early brushes with the establishment. In the same year he was committed to prepare a trilogy of plays for television, *House of Banijegi*, which was only partially realised, and *The Night of the Hunted* and the last, which had no name and only two episodes and was not produced. In the same year Soyinka attended conferences in Italy and the United States. His poetry was published in Sweden. Soyinka also presented a film about Nigerian culture which was sadly reduced to "Culture in Transition" and which contained an abbreviated version of his play *The Strong Breed*, a play about the persistence of scapegoat sacrifices in certain African communities.

He continued to be a regular contributor to Nigerian controversies through the press. To a certain extent, he manipulated the media to influence the people of his country. He attacked a powerful movement called Negritude, he jeered at the expatriate literary critics, he complained of press censorship (this was a time of political violence, victimisation and repression in Nigeria). In 1963 the "1960 Masks" produced a satirical revue written by Soyinka. He got the post of lecturer in English at University College, Ife; however, he didn't last long. In 1963 he resigned along with other faculty members in protest against the state of Emergency that was imposed by the Western Nigerian chief, Awolowo. Soyinka continued his literary criticism in talks and essays.

In 1964 there was a strike and talk of a revolution. Soyinka advocated a people's uprising and worked towards it. At this time there were a number of plays that brought together Nigerian theatre in English with Nigerian theatre in Yoruba. Soyinka contributed *The Lion and the Jewel.* A new group was formed by a band of theatre enthusiasts who were hopeful of becoming professional called "Orisun Theatre." Here the productions were more professional unlike the amateur "1960 Masks."

In 1965 political violence erupted in Western Nigeria. Ministers were murdered and party arson was rampant. Soyinka valiantly produced *Before the Blackout*, an attack on opportunist politicians, corrupt time-servers and conscienceless manipulators. In August that year there was a national crisis. Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* was produced in the Federal Palace Hotel, Lagos. In September 1965 Soyinka travelled

to Britain to read a long poem, "Idanre," as part of the Commonwealth Arts Festival. He acted in an advisory capacity on the production of his metaphysical-satirical play, *The Road*, a play about the meaning of death in a purposeless and transitory existence, which was presented on the fringe of the festival at the Theatre Royal, Stratford. He also took part in a recording of *The Detainee*, a political piece written for the BBC. It warned people against one-party states and dictators. It was broadcast to a large part of Africa although it was not published. In 1965, back in Nigeria, Soyinka was appointed as senior lecturer at the University of Lagos. In this year he published his major novel, *The Interpreters*, which some claim to be the first really modern novel to come out of Africa. There were elections in Nigeria, marred by violence, and Chief S.L. Akintola was declared the winner. Instead of the winner's victory address, the Nigerians heard part of a tape which began, "This is the voice of Free Nigeria" and went on to advise Akintola and his "crew of renegades" to leave the country. Was this a private broadcast? A prank? A rehearsal for an overthrow of the government? Listeners were intrigued and a warrant was issued for the man who was behind it all--Wole Soyinka.

In the trial that followed the arrest, a trial that was occasionally as farcical as parts of *The Trials of Brother Jero,* but which, nevertheless, could have brought a heavy sentence, Soyinka pleaded "Not guilty." He was eventually set free on what some regarded as a technicality. His jubilant supporters hoisted Soyinka on their shoulders and carried him from the court. This trial naturally brought Soyinka a great deal of publicity for some weeks.

The years 1966 and 1967 were turbulent ones for Nigerian politics. At first there was a coup of the radical and progressive officers. Then a counter-coup brought Yakuba Gowon to power. There was a secession of the region of Biafra and Nigeria drifted into civil war. Despite the political upheavals, Soyinka was as productive as ever. He wrote poetry ("Massacre October '66" and "For Her Who Rejoiced") and essays and directed plays like Lindsay Barrett's *Home Again* and Arthur Miller's *Crucible*. Soyinka also completed and submitted for publication the important works, "And After the Narcissist?"(a work of criticism), "Of Power and Change," (a piece of political comment) and "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy" (an important piece of dramatic theory which is included as an appendix under the title 'The Fourth Stage' to his later work *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 1976). Predictably, Soyinka was not silent on the political front either. In his numerous contributions to the Nigerian press he campaigned for appropriate peace initiatives in the north and a cease-fire in the war against Biafra. He also published a furious indictment against those he called "patriots and other sordid racketeers." He was arrested and detained without a trial in August 1967 partly because of the indictment.

Soyinka was detained for twenty-seven long months, fifteen of which were spent in solitary confinement, in the Kaduna Prison. He describes his prison experiences in *The Man Died* which was published only in 1972. The title refers to the fact that the government kept Soyinka incommunicado in an effort to silence his rebellious voice. All the time that he was in prison Soyinka wrote poetry with a quill and cell-manufactured "ink" in between the lines of printed books. He also completed preliminary writing for plays and a novel. Despite the long confinement, the man's spirit could not be broken nor could his hand be stayed.

2.4 THE SEVENTIES

Once released in October 1969 Soyinka was appointed the director of the school of drama at the University of Ibadan. At this time Soyinka produced his play, *Kongi's Harvest* (a play about the tyranny and cruelty rampant in postcolonial Africa) giving

it an anti-military, anti-Gowon slant. The following year Soyinka prepared the screenplay of *Kongi's Harvest* for a film company. In March and April, 1970, Soyinka acted the lead role of Kongi in front of the film cameras. A few months later, in July, at Soyinka's initiative, the Theatre Arts Company and a department of Theatre Arts was established in Ibadan. Soyinka was invited to the Eugene O'Neill Centre in Waterford, Connecticut in the United States. He took with him an incomplete manuscript of his play *Madmen and Specialists* which he may have begun in prison. While in the United States he added to the script, reworked it and presented it at the Centre and to local black communities. In March 1971 he presented a revised *Madmen and Specialists* back home in Ibadan. The same year, he left Gowon's Nigeria for a "brief exile," which he spent mainly in Europe.

Between 1971 and 1974 Soyinka travelled in many parts of the world, delivering lectures, writing essays, compiling a book of African poetry, writing *The Man Died* and a second novel, *Season of Anomy*, in addition to three important plays. The first of these, *Jero's Metamorphosis*, was like the sketches of the '60s, only longer and more elaborate in form and pessimistic in tone. *The Bacchae* was written on commission from the National Theatre in London and was a radical rewriting of the ancient Greek playwright Euripides's masterpiece. *Death and the King's Horseman* was written while Soyinka was a fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge. It was based on a historical event. At the same time, 1973, as the fellowship at Churchill College, Cambridge, Soyinka was Visiting Professor at Sheffield University, England.

In 1974 Soyinka left Europe for Accra, Ghana. He became the editor of Africa's leading intellectual magazine, *Transition*, and used it to support socialist revolutionary movements in Africa and to attack tyrants like Bokassa and Idi Amin. Around this time he changed his name to Ch'Indaba. He became engaged in a debate with those who regarded him as a reactionary figure because they wanted to radically decolonise African literature. In spite of this ongoing debate, Soyinka joined in the inauguration of the Union of Writers of African Peoples and was elected its General Secretary.

In July 1975 there came another change in the Nigerian political scene:Gowon was overthrown in a coup and Murtala Muhammad came to power at the head of a military government. In December of that year Soyinka returned home and within a month, in January 1976, he was appointed Professor at the University of Ife. Soyinka's alliance with the establishment was an uneasy one, particularly after the assasination of Murtala Muhammad during an attempted putsch. Olusegun Obasanjo then became head of state. Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World*, a collection of lectures delivered in England in 1973, was published in this year. It is an invaluable reference book for those unfamiliar with African drama and the African world-view and written, as he explains, tongue-in-cheek, in the Preface, as a response to those academics in England who "did not believe in any such mythical beast as 'African literature'" (vii).

Nigeria was passing through very trying times. The rise of oil prices in the '70s created an oil-boom economy, and suddenly everyone was out to make a quick fortune. Political corruption was blatant; inequalities in wealth rampant. Intellectuals and artists believed that theatre, like the other arts, should contribute to positive social thinking and a better community sense. To this end, Soyinka took on certain civic responsibilities, such as improving road safety and involving himself in the administration of the second Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture which was held in January, 1977.

In December 1976 Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* was produced, followed, in 1977, by his *Opera Wonyosi*, an adaptation of Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. *Opera Wonyosi* attacked, often in song, a number of African tyrants and many of the values, or rather, non-values, of oil-boom Nigeria. This was a large-scale production, held in a well-equipped theatre building. Plans to present the play in Lagos, however, were thwarted by certain reactionary forces. Soyinka then formed a new group called the Guerrilla Theatre Unit of the University of Ife. For this group he began writing little plays or playlets to be performed on the streets, in the marketplaces and in lorry parks--very akin to Indian street theatre. Two such playlets or "hit and run pieces" as they were called, under the title Before the Blow-Out followed up the careers of the crooks and charlatans introduced in the *Opera Wonyosi* and in this way commented on the contemporary events surrounding the preparations for a return to civilian rule.

In 1979 Soyinka directed and acted in *The Biko Inquest*, an edited version of the trial of Steve Biko, the South African leader who died in police custody. All the parts were played by black actors. The work was an expose of the inhumanity and deceit inherent in the apartheid of South Africa. The piece was also relevant to Nigeria where police atrocities and a corrupt judiciary were omnipresent. In September and October 1979 Soyinka directed *Death and the King's Horseman* in Chicago. The production was very well-received and another performance was held in Washington D.C. Soyinka was highly acclaimed in the United States, but the picture was slightly different in Nigeria. Although Soyinka made a number of trips back to Nigeria, his people felt he had deserted them at a critical time: Nigerian elections were on. In October Shehu Shagari was elected President. The opposition, the United Party of Nigeria or the UPN, declared that Shagari had won by unfair means. Soyinka's affiliations were with the UPN. Although Soyinka was attracted to the radical socialism of the People's Redemption Party (the PRP), he never joined that party. He said he considered himself a "self-suspended member," since he challenged the attitudes and actions of some of its leaders.

2.5 THE EARLY EIGHTIES

Soyinka was the chairman of the Oyo State Road Safety Corps, a result of his long association with civic upliftment and his belief that art and artists could make a difference to society. All of 1980 he was very busy with the activities of the Road Safety Corps and in the university life at Ife. The Vice Chancellor of the university, Tunji Aboyade, was his close friend and hunting companion. In December he delivered a lecture on the topic, "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and other Mythologies," which continued his debate with the Leftist critics.

In 1981 Soyinka was a visiting professor at Yale University in the United States. He returned to Nigeria frequently. Back in Ife there were a number of pressing public issues: acute water shortage, the collapse of the hostel, overcrowding in student rooms, attacks on the Vice Chancellor, the deaths of four students while taking part in a peaceful demonstration, even ritual murder. Besides being involved in these crises, Soyinka also wrote a brief sketch attacking the racketeering in rice in Nigeria. This play which was presented in the heart of Lagos as part of a demonstration.

In January 1982 Soyinka launched *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, his colourful, funny and intense autobiography of the first eleven or so years of his life, in Abeokuta. This book was begun in Accra and completed after Soyinka's return to Nigeria in 1976. Hailed as a major literary achievement, the work carries enough evidence of Soyinka the dramatist, particularly in its characterisation and dialogue. There is the

description of Mrs. Odufuwa, Soyinka's godfather's wife, visiting their home. Soyinka admired her as "quite simply and without dispute from any but the blindest man with the coarsest sensibilities, the most beautiful woman in the world" (Ake 99). She had a trick of giving each child a nickname and the one she chose for Soyinka was Lagilagi, the Log-splitter. However, Joseph objects to the name being inappropriate because Soyinka "'cannot *la* anything. He is so lazy he can't move a fly off his nose until it has begun to produce maggots.'" Adding insult to injury Joseph points to Soyinka's younger brother Dipo and says, " 'Look at his brother, almost three years his junior. He is far tougher than the one you've named Lagilagi. I bet Dipo can already lift that axe and split wood with it.' " Soyinka's mother, Wild Christian, joins in at this point: "'All he does is sneak off into corners by himself--reading, always reading. He pretends to be busy with books because he cannot tackle anything else.'" When Soyinka's sister sniggers, "If you touch him he will faint, then die altogether of fright....let him run under the skirts of his books,'" and Joseph says "'Dipo can give him a thorough beating,'" Soyinka is impelled to salvage his honour in front of the woman he so admires (he calls Mrs. Odufuwa his "future wife") by beating his younger brother to pulp (*Ake* 99-102). *Ake* is also the work of a man long criticised by fellow Nigerians for being "too European," but the book is full of Yoruba rhymes and phrases, translated only in footnotes, and in no way has Soyinka tried to give his family a Euro-friendly gloss to make them more accessible to the white reader. In fact, at one stage Soyinka recalls the conversation he has with his great-grandfather Ransome-Kuti about the relative merits and demerits of the African schools versus the schools run by the whites. Ransome-Kuti is very surprised that Soyinka has shifted his allegiance from the African AGS schools to those run by the whites: "They teach you to say 'sir' in those schools. Only slaves say 'Sir'. That is one of their ways of removing character from boys at an impressionable age--Sir, sir, sir, sir, sir! Very bad...." (*Ake* 185). When Soyinka explains that the schools run by the whites offer scholarships, Ransome-Kuti thinks he can understand why the boy prefers them. *Ake* proved to be very popular in the United States and England. *The Evening Standard* (England) called it "a major contribution to contemporary English literature that will surely number among the classics of childhood," while the *Village Voice* (U.S.A.) described it as a "superb act of remembrance...dazzling reading."

Soyinka took advantage of the launch of the book to continue his attack on Shagari's government. He listed as the ironic "achievements" of the ruler the Bakolori Massacre, the subversion of the Kano state government, the destruction of the offices of the *Triumph* newspaper, Shuguba's deportation, the storming of the elected legislature, the depletion of the national wealth of Nigeria, the butchering of Bala Muhammad, and the deaths of students, athletes and youth workers at the hands of the police.

In March and April, 1982 Soyinka staged an early radio play of his, *Camwood on the Leaves*, at the National Theatre in Lagos. This play proved that he was interested in more subtle forms of consciousness raising than strident and vituperative social criticism. On 18th August, 1982, Soyinka was once again in England, this time delivering the Stratford-on-Avon lecture on "Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist." Influences of Shakespeare can be seen in a number of his plays, including *A Dance of the Forests*. In December of the same year the African service of the BBC broadcast Soyinka's half-hour radio play, *Die Still Rev. Dr. Godspeak!* This play was concerned with the widespread influence of metaphysicians and parapsychologists in Nigeria. In early 1983 Soyinka directed a full-length play, *Requiem for a Futurologist*, and toured with it. This play made fun of the credulous and exposed charlatans in much the same way as *The Trials of Brother Jero*. The play was occasionally accompanied by agit-prop sketches: *Festac 77, Green Revolution, Ethical Revolution* and others, known collectively as *Priority Projects*.

Here the means of social criticism were spectacle, simple dialogue, hard-hitting lyrics and good music. In July 1983 the songs were recorded and released on a record titled *Unlimited Liability Co.* The title song was one which critiqued the Nigerian government tongue-in-cheek as a badly-run company led by a chairman who lacked the will and the ability to control corrupt directors. The record was sold and broadcast before the August national elections. A little before election day another Soyinka song, "Take the first step," replenished the ammunition of the opposition parties in their campaign to beat Shagari and his National Party of Nigeria (NPN) at the polls.

The elections were predictably violent and turbulent in some states. The results revealed Shagari as the victor once again. Soyinka went to London and through the British press and the African service of the BBC he described the background to the elections, including the manipulation of the western press and the distortions in the official results. He predicted that there would be "a coup or a civil war or a combination of both." Soyinka returned to Ife in spite of threats of police and libel action against *The Man Died*. His predictions were proved right when, on 31 December, 1983, Shagari was overthrown by a coup which brought Muhammad Buhari to power. The abuses of the Shagari government which Soyinka had already pointed out--a vastly corrupt administration, irregularities in the marketing of rice, the construction of a new capital at Abuja--were now cited by the coup makers. Soyinka was, by his own admission, "in the thick of the '83 election" (Maja-Pearce 151). Although Soyinka applauded Buhari's anti-corruption stance, he did not agree with the sweeping ban Buhari imposed on all political parties.

During 1983-84 Soyinka had worked on a film, *Blues for a Prodigal*, which was originally planned, in Soyinka's words, as a "straightforward propaganda film...an almost unambiguous call to arms"(Gibbs 17.) However, after the December coup of the Shagari government, the approach was modified. In February 1984 came the verdict on *The Man Died*: despite the new government, the book was banned. In May 1984 a production of Soyinka's play *The Road* opened in Chicago (where *Death and the King's Horseman* had been so well-received in 1979) and, in December 1984, Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* premiered at Yale University, where he had been a Visiting Professor in 1981. Like *Opera Wonyosi*, *A Play of Giants* is a severe attack on contemporary African dictators like Jen-Bedel Bokassa, the malignant dictator of Central Africa of almost comic-opera proportions, Idi Amin of Uganda, Macias Nguemo of Equitorial Guinea and, of course, General Yakubu Gowon of Soyinka's own Nigeria.

In 1986 Wole Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, to many the ultimate accolade that can be won in one's lifetime. However, Soyinka was not one to let any honour bestowed by the west muffle his tongue or blindfold his conscience. In his acceptance speech, "This Past Must Address Its Present," Soyinka launched a searing attack on the ingrained racism in many of the heavyweights of western culture, Locke, Voltaire, Hegel, Hume, Montesquieu. He felt their works ought to be stamped with the warning, "THIS WORK IS DANGEROUS FOR YOUR RACIAL SELF-ESTEEM" (Maja-Pearce 21). He is amazed that the work of the ethnologist Leo Frobenius, "a notorious plunderer, one of a long line of European archaelogical raiders," who laments that the beauties of Yoruba art be left to such "degenerate and feeble-minded posterity" as the Yoruba people, is still revered, even by black scholars (Maja-Pearce 18-19). Such an outspoken attack is typical of Soyinka's courage of conviction and reminds us, what an important agent of social change the artist can still be if he or she is not afraid to speak out.

2.6 THE LATE EIGHTIES AND THE NINETIES

In 1988 Soyinka was appointed Professor of African Studies and Theatre at Cornell University. *Isara: A Voyage Around Essay* the sequel to *Ake: The Years of Childhood* appeared in 1990 as did *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems. From Zia, With Love* (1992) is a cutting expose of contemporary Nigerian politics and society. It is written in much the same vein as Soyinka's earlier play, *Requiem for a Futurologist*, except that the mood seems to be even darker. Soyinka's disenchantment and disillusionment with Nigerian political leaders is by now quite deep-rooted. This is undoubtedly a result of his long political activism, of being able to see these leaders from close quarters. The play *A Scourge of Hyacinths* was also written in the nineties. *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (1996), an impassioned examination of the contemporary political turbulence in Nigeria, appeared in 1996. In this Soyinka describes what he calls "my 'Rambo' departure from the Nigerian nation space." In this book Soyinka's fury is focussed on a single day--June 23, 1993--and on one man--the brutal military dictator, General Sani Abacha whom Soyinka describes in 1997 as "the most ruthless, unconscionable dictator we have ever known in Nigeria." It was on that day that the country's free and fair elections were annulled and the victor, Moshood Abiola, imprisoned. "Under a dictatorship a nation ceases to exist," says Soyinka in *The Open Sore*. "All that remains is a fiefdom, a planet of slaves regimented by aliens from outer space." Although in Nigeria the opposition has been exiled, imprisoned or driven underground, Soyinka hopes that they are quietly mobilising. The book was named one of the twenty-five best books of 1996 by the American publication *The Village Voice* .

Soyinka fled to the United States in 1995, fearing he was about to be arrested. That self-imposed exile lasts to this day. In March 1997, he was charged with treason. Authorities under the dictator Sani Abacha claimed Soyinka and fourteen others were behind a series of bombings. Since Abacha's death in June, military ruler Abdulsalami Abubakar has freed hundreds of political prisoners, scheduled elections and promised a return to civilian rule. Abubakar dropped the charges against the fifteen people, saying it was a reconciliatory gesture. While Soyinka said "the right thing had been done," he refused to return to Nigeria. Soyinka now spends most of his time in the United States. He has been a Professor in African American Studies at Emory University, Atlanta, U.S.A since 1996. He travels to England and other parts of Europe to deliver talks or to conduct poetry workshops. In a 1993 interview with 'Biyi Bandele Thomas he speaks forcefully about the mess Babangida created in Nigeria--"a divided army, a divided nation, and all because of the...quirks, of the irrationality of one individual and his tiny junta" (Maha-Pearce 148). At one point he laments "something is certainly required, call it ethical rearmament, call it human rearmament, we certainly need some kind of rearmament. And it can only begin with an improvement in the quality of the life of the people, with an evident commencement of transformation of the physical environment, and of course a reduction of corruption" (Maja-Pearce 157.) So we see that the issues that so ignited the young Soyinka are still close to his heart--the amelioration of the lot of the common person, civil liberties, a minimal degree of corruption on the part of the ruling classes accompanied by a large dose of efficiency. He is pragmatic enough to know that no corruption is an impossibility. As he says in the same interview, he'd prefer "a competent crook rather than an incompetent, inept angel" as the head of state (Maja-Pearce 156). He tells John D. Thomas in 1997 that it is his "commitment to the cause" in Nigeria that allows him to teach only a single semester at Emory and to leave the other semester entirely free for his own work. The former military ruler Olusengun Obasanjo won the Nigerian presidential elections in Spring 1999. At the time of this manuscript going to press, he is still the President. For Nigeria, Africa's

most populous country, ruled by the army for the past fifteen years, civilian rule appears very distant. Soyinka's decision not to return is perhaps a wise one in the circumstances.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have taken a look at Soyinka's family, his childhood and the four main decades of his eventful life, a life which continues to this day in exile in the United States. Soyinka's family, particularly on the maternal side was a remarkable one and his mother and maternal relations played an important role in his childhood. He was Christian and partly English-educated but he was closely in touch with all things Yoruba. His years in England (he went there on a scholarship) in the late fifties proved to be very fruitful. In Leeds he learnt all about the western theatre tradition, and in London he had hands-on experience working in the Royal Court Theatre. This was the period of his literary apprenticeship, and he drafted and produced two of his early plays, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel*, in London and in Ibadan, Nigeria.

1960, the year of Nigerian independence, had Soyinka writing and producing *A Dance of the Forests* for the occasion of Nigeria's independence. He travelled all over Nigeria on an American grant studying the traditional drama of Western Africa and the ceremonies and rituals associated with Yoruba festivals--all these were to influence his work. He taught at the University of Ibadan and formed a theatre group called "1960 Masks" which staged *A Dance of the Forests* with Soyinka himself playing Forest Father. Soyinka wrote scripts for radio and television critiquing social ills and wrote to the newspapers at any hint of political controversy. In 1965 Soyinka published his first novel, *The Interpreters*, which some claim is the first really modern novel to come out of Africa. From 1965 onwards there was considerable political unrest in Nigeria with widespread violence. Soyinka, at this time a senior lecturer at Lagos, was arrested for broadcasting a message which advised Akintola, the winner of the elections, to leave the country. After a farcical trial Soyinka was released. In the sixties he remained very productive despite the political turmoil, writing and publishing essays, and staging plays by Miller and Barrett. He was arrested and detained without a trial for twenty-seven months partly because of a furious indictment he wrote of the political regime. Even when in solitary confinement in Kaduna Prison Soyinka did not stop writing. When he was released he was appointed the director of a school of drama at Ibadan. He acted in and produced *Kongi's Harvest*, created a department of Theatre Arts in Ibadan, and travelled to the United States and produced *Madmen and Specialists* there and back home in Ibadan.

In 1971 he left on a brief, self-imposed exile from Gowon's Nigeria and spent the next three years travelling in many parts of the world, lecturing, writing essays, compiling a book of African poetry besides writing plays (*Death and the King's Horseman, Opera Wonyosi*) and a second novel. The rest of the decade was spent in Ghana, Nigeria, the United States and Europe, writing plays, having them produced, editing the leading African intellectual magazine *Transition*. All the while governments were being formed and overthrown in a crisis ridden Nigeria.

In the eighties Soyinka undertook a number of civic responsibilities such as being Chairman of the Oyo Road Safety Corps. He divided his time between Yale, where he was Visiting Professor, and Nigeria. He published *Ake*, the vivid account of his childhood, wrote and broadcast radio plays, worked on a film, and managed to be in the thick of the 1983 Nigerian elections as well. While his account of his prison

experience, *The Man Died*, was banned, his plays were being produced quite regularly in the United States. He returned to Ife from London in 1983 despite threats of police and libel action against *The Man Died*. In 1986 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and launched a scathing attack on racism and the misrepresentation of Africa by European scholars in his acceptance speech.

In the late eighties and nineties Soyinka continued to teach in the United States and to write scathing political critiques both in the form of fiction and non-fiction. In 1995 he fled from Nigeria to the United States fearing political persecution. Despite the present Nigerian government's pardon of the 1997 charge of treason, he refuses to return. At present he is on the faculty of Emory University, U.S.A., teaching only a single semester so that he can write ceaselessly for the cause of freedom and an able democracy in Nigeria.

2.8 GLOSSARY

Pariah:	social outcast
Pillage:	plunder
Enfant terrible:	literally French for "unmanageable child"; a person of startlingly unconventional behaviour and ideas
Negritude:	The quality or characteristic of being a Negro (Black); affirmation of the value of Black or African culture, identity, etc.

2.9 QUESTIONS

Q.1. What are the ways in which Soyinka's family and childhood influenced him?
Q.2. What did Soyinka learn from his apprentice years in London and from touring Nigeria on a Rockefeller grant? Suggest briefly how disparate elements are blended in his work.
Q.3. Write an essay on Soyinka's political activism.

2.10 SUGGESTED READING

Gibbs, James. *Wole Soyinka.* London: Macmillan, 1986.
Thomas, John D. "A Dramatic Life." Online. Internet. 1 Sep. 1998.
Soyinka, Wole. *Ake* and *Isara.* London:Minerva, 1991.
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UNIT 3 *A DANCE OF THE FORESTS*: SUMMARY

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Summary of Part One of the play
3.2 Summary of Part Two of the Play
3.3 Summary of the Play-Within-A-Play: *The Court of Mata Kharibu*
3.4 Let Us Sum Up
3.5 Glossary
3.6 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit I have summarised the two parts of the play as well as the play-within-a-play. This is to help you keep track of the often confusing plethora of characters and incidents that unfold in this play. Since the characters double up and take on two roles, the possibility of losing one's sense of direction increases. This unit can also be used as a means of ready reference while one is studying the next unit, the critical analysis of the play. I have highlighted the names of characters on their first appearance--beware, the names too often sound alike! Try not to confuse the characters like Adenebi and Obaneji.

3.1 SUMMARY OF PART ONE

The play begins with a short prologue spoken by *Aroni* the lame one which establishes the connection between the two sets of characters placed in the two different time frames of the play, the first the present, during the Feast of the Human Community and the second the past, during the reign of *Mata Kharibu*. Aroni also briefly introduces the concepts of *Ogun* and *Eshuoro* and how they are presented in the play. By way of transition to Part One *Aroni* speaks of the totem pole, the "symbol of the great re-union" that *Demoke*, the son of the *Old Man*, has been chosen to carve.

After the prologue the *Dead Man* and the pregnant *Dead Woman* appear on stage and wonder whether they have come to the right place. They ask for help and directions to *Adenebi* the Council orator, *Demoke* the carver, *Obaneji* and *Rola* the courtesan, all of who refuse. Thus within the first few minutes of the play we have met almost all the main characters. As a result of the behaviour of the living characters the two dead characters feel they should not have obeyed the summons to appear in the world of the living. After the exit of the dead pair the four living characters sit down and start talking. They talk among other things of the totem that *Demoke* has carved and which is now the centre of attraction. The reappearance of the dead pair makes the living wander off stage in order to avoid contact.

The next section (there are no acts and scenes in this play--stage settings denote changes in locale) is an exchange between *Aroni* the lame one and *Murete* a tree imp about the festivities and rituals that are about to begin to celebrate the gathering of the tribes, among them the welcoming of the dead. *Aroni* wants to extract

information from the mischievous and unwilling witness, *Murete*, as to who it has seen passing by him (Murete is hidden in his tree home). We learn that the dead pair has been sent by *Aroni* as a result of the request of the living for some representatives of their illustrious ancestors. *Aroni* informs *Murete* that one of the four living characters who has passed by *Murete's* tree is a servant of Ogun.

Once Aroni exits and Murete disappears inside his tree to continue spying, Agboreko, the Elder of the Sealed Lips, enters and tries to coax Murete out of the tree and extract information, only to be told that he has to return later. Next it is Ogun's turn to enter and get information from Murete--this he does by the simple means of forcing a lot of alcohol down Murete's throat. We learn from Ogun that it is Demoke the carver who is Ogun's servant among the living characters. There's also some talk of Eshuoro, a wayward cult-spirit, whom Murete drunkenly threatens to bite if he comes anywhere close. Before leaving Ogun says that he will not forget that Demoke had injured the araba tree, Eshuoro's favourite, while carving the totem pole.

After Ogun's exit the four living characters we have encountered before, Demoke, Obaneji, Rola and Adenebi, reenter and begin their conversation by conjecturing about the identity of the two dead persons. Obaneji reveals that he knows quite a bit about people's secrets because he has been a senior filing clerk for the Courts. Rola begins to taunt him but Adenebi interrupts and says there should be no unpleasantness since they have to spend time in each others' company. Obaneji explains some of the interesting parts of his job, such as the records for motor lorries, for which he owns a passion. There was one such lorry, the Incinerator, for which the concerned official took a substantial bribe and changed the capacity from forty to seventy. Once it caught fire only five of the seventy on board managed to escape. All of the passengers were on their way to the gathering of the tribes.

Obaneji asks Adenebi to find out some information for him. The characters launch into an argument as to how the bribe-taking official ought to be punished. Demoke says he'd much rather die from a fall from a great height as did his assistant on the totem pole rather than be burnt to death like the unfortunate lorry passengers. Adenebi refuses to answer how he would wish to die. Rola answers Obaneji's question with a kiss. When Obaneji refuses to respond to her advances she taunts him saying he is not a man. Obaneji retorts by saying that she is so promiscuous and so cruel that the graveyard is full of her lovers. As a result of this exchange Demoke guesses that Rola is none other than the infamous Madame Tortoise. He confesses that she dominated his thoughts when he carved the totem. Rola attacks Obaneji for revealing her identity. Adenebi is disgusted to be in her company and shocked at her brazenness. Rola asserts that she regrets nothing and if her lovers killed themselves that was their problem. She is proud to have used her physical assets to acquire wealth. Adenebi accuses her of ruining thousands in order to amass her riches. Demoke asks Rola if she was aware of the legendary Madame Tortoise.

The dead pair enters and the Dead Man speaks of how he'd always wanted to return here to his home. Demoke wants to know if the carver who fell to his death from the totem blames Demoke. The dead pair leaves in despair of being saved by the living, saying, "May you be cursed again."

After they leave Demoke confesses that he pushed his apprentice, Oremole, off the totem pole. Unable to bear being taunted by the boastful Oremole, servant of Oro, and "fawner of Eshuoro," and unable to tolerate being prevented from trimming the araba tree, Demoke pushed Oremole off the pole and then cut off his head.

A man's voice is heard calling Demoke, and Obaneji leads them away in the wrong direction. Ogun enters and admits that he imitated Demoke's father's voice just now. Ogun takes Demoke's crime on his own shoulders because Oro is his enemy and Oremole was Oro's follower. It was Ogun who made Demoke raise his hand because Oremole would not allow Demoke to bow the araba tree's head and master wood with his iron axe. Ogun tells Forest Father, masquerading as a human being (Obaneji) that he'll not desert his son at the moment of trial and punishment.

As Ogun leaves the Old Man enters with two councillors and lots of beaters. The Old Man asks after his son Demoke but the councillor tells him that he has seen Adenebi, not Demoke. Adenebi enters and says he hears they're looking for "some shady characters." The Old man says yes. They have no cages or nets to capture them--just driving them away will be enough. The Old Man says they have to drive away their guests because the wrong people have come--statesmen were asked for and executioners came instead.

The Old Man orders petrol to be poured all over the forest because the dead cannot stand the smell. Then he changes his mind, realising that the whole forest would be burnt down. Instead, he orders that an old wagon, the Chimney of Ereko, be driven through the forest, polluting it with smoke. The Old Man is sure no ghost can survive the Chimney's smoke.

Adenebi is confused by the Old Man wanting to drive away the very guests he has invited. He recalls the ambitious plans for the gathering of the tribes--the building of the totem pole, the bringing home of the "scattered sons" of their "proud ancestors," be they sages, conquerors, philosophers, mystics, warriors, even from hell if need be. The Old Man says that their plans have misfired and instead of great people, "slaves and lackeys" have come to accuse their hosts in the land of the living and undermine the whole celebration. Adenebi goes on and on about how he had expected the great heroes of old to appear while the Old Man restlessly waits for Agboreko to come and report what information he has got from Murete. Agboreko enters and reports that the dead pair, so full of their own woes, has been taken under Aroni's wing so they won't trouble the living. The dead pair is closely related to Madame Tortoise. Murete has refused to reveal where Aroni will hold his court. The Old Man asks Agboreko if Oremole, Demoke's apprentice, is among the dead and if the dead pair will accuse Demoke on Oremole's behalf. Agboreko does not know. The Old Man then asks if Forest Father works along with Aroni, and Adenebi asks about Forest Father and the others are amazed that he does not know of him. Agboreko leaves to try and get more information from Murete. As Adenebi leaves he tells the Old Man that he saw Demoke in the forest and that there were two others, besides himself, with Demoke. When the Old Man asks him if he heard anything or met anyone else, Adenebi says there were two "unpleasant looking" "mad creatures" who followed them around and made him sick. He also discovered that the woman with them was Madame Tortoise. In order to avoid being seen with such a disreputable woman, he left. The Old Man becomes very agitated to learn that his son is in the company of Madame Tortoise and he conjectures that the fourth person (Obaneji) must be Eshuoro, thirsting for the blood of the slayer of his servant, Oremole. He calls out to Agboreko who enters almost immediately. The Old Man and Agboreko conjecture who the fourth living being could be. The Old Man is convinced it is Eshuoro while Agboreko surmises that it could even be Forest Father himself. The Old Man becomes impatient and agitated, and Agboreko tries to calm him down by reciting proverbs.

The beaters enter along with the flogger who clears a space for his whip which he then freely uses. The dancer, the dancer's acolyte and the Dirge-man begin their work. The Dirge-man asks for room for the dead and Agboreko makes his prophecy

with the help of the divination board, the bowl and kernels. But his prophecy--"The loft is not out of reach when the dust means to settle"--does not satisfy the Old Man. The Dirge-man and Agboreko take turns in making a number of statements referring to figures in Yoruba myth. The Dirge-man repeats his request for leaving the dead enough "room to dance." The Old Man makes fun of Agboreko's meaningless platitudes ("Proverb to bones and silence" is a particular favourite). Suddenly a lorry appears, its headlights flashing--it is the Chimney of Ereko. Agboreko mistakes its roar for thunder. It is now Agboreko's turn to laugh at the Old Man for believing he can get rid of the dead with such toys.

The crowd panics at the sight of the Chimney and tries to flee. Adenebi is knocked down and trampled. He cries out for Demoke and Madame Tortoise, whom he now terms his "friends." An assortment of forest creatures and spirits pass across the stage grumbling and holding their noses because of the petrol fumes from the lorry.

Obaneji, Rola and Demoke enter. Obaneji once again asks Adenebi if he has found out the information he required—who was responsible for the deaths of the sixty-five lorry passengers. Adenebi says he wants to be left alone. Obaneji, Rola and Demoke go to the welcoming of the dead. After hesitating, Adenebi runs after them.

3.2 SUMMARY OF PART TWO

Part Two begins with Murete grumbling to himself because he can't drink the milk of the palm tree in which he lives. He is about to leave for the human celebrations when Eshuoro grasps his throat from behind. Eshuoro asks him to swear that Murete hasn't seen him. Eshuoro wants to know if today is the day for Aroni's ceremony of the welcome of the dead—a ceremony which will be a lesson for the humans. Eshuoro says that the humans have spoilt too much of the forest by their greed and thoughtlessness and today must be a day for the forest to fight back. He has no patience for Forest Father and Aroni's "gentle rebuke(s)." Murete is not bothered because he feels the forest claims its own victims; its recompense is given or forced out of the humans.

Eshuoro has decided that even if Aroni lets the human witnesses go, he won't. Eshuoro is furious at the way the humans have destroyed the forest. He wants justice. He is particularly incensed by the totem pole which he calls "the centrepiece of their (the humans') vulgarity." Murete insults him and says that it is an offering of which even Forest Father would have approved.

Murete runs off as Eshuoro threatens him with a branch. Eshuoro then dances and rants in fury. He is particularly angry with Demoke who carves and defaces trees. He threatens that he and Oro will have their revenge. He rushes off the stage.

In another part of the forest the Forest Crier comes in with a scroll and strikes his gong. The Forest Spirits listen to him either from their hiding places or out in the open. The Forest Crier informs all the forest creatures that tonight is the welcome of the dead. He clarifies that only those spirits of the dead that are specifically summoned can be seen or heard this night.

Forest Father and Aroni enter and exchange a few words about how tame the human witnesses have become and how they do not suspect Forest Father's identity. As the play-within-a-play begins, Aroni reminds Forest Father that they have gone back eight centuries, perhaps even more.

3.3 THE PLAY-WITHIN-A- PLAY: THE COURT OF MATA KHARIBU

The scene that is gradually lit up is the court of Mata Kharibu. The King and Madame Tortoise, soon to be his Queen, the Court Poet (Demoke) and his young scribe are present on stage. Mata Kharibu is very angry; Madame Tortoise gay and flirtatious. The poet tries not to respond to her coquetry. The conversation is entirely between Madame Tortoise and the Court Poet. Madame Tortoise says that she is sad because she's lost her canary which has flown off to the roof. She orders the poet to fetch it. The poet's novice immediately offers to go. The Court Poet doesn't want him to go because a soldier fell to his death from the same roof two days ago, but Madame Tortoise overrules him.

After the poet follows his scribe out, a chained warrior is pushed in. It is the Dead Man. Mata Kharibu slaps him and accuses him of being a traitor. The warrior has persuaded his soldiers not to fight an unjust war on the king's behalf—this is his treason.

The Physician (the Old Man) tries to persuade the warrior to agree to Mata Kharibu's war, calling it not a war to gather a woman's trousseau but an affair of honour. The warrior refuses to believe that it is honourable to steal another chieftain's wife, as Mata Kharibu has done, and then to declare war on that chieftain in order to recover the abducted woman's goods. He tells the Physician to return to the king. Even when the Physician says posterity will call the man a traitor and hints at the warrior's vulnerable pregnant wife, the warrior refuses to give in. His first loyalty is to his men. The Physician asks him if he has the right to risk the lives of those men by convincing them that they should disobey Mata Kharibu. The warrior realises that Mata Kharibu is worried about a possible revolt among his men--hence this effort to persuade or threaten the warrior.

The Historian (Adenebi) then enters with a scroll and tries to persuade Mata Kharibu to be more severe with the warrior who refuses to admit to what he calls the eternal necessity of history: war. He cites the example of the ancient Greeks and Trojans where the Trojan War was the one thing that immortalised that period in history. The Historian is convinced that only a man with slave's blood could refuse to fight.

As Mata Kharibu vows to be rid of all such men as the warrior, the Soothsayer (Agboreko) enters. He predicts a lot of bloodshed in the coming battle. Mata Kharibu is pleased because it signifies a great battle and orders that the warrior and his followers be "sent down the river" or drowned. A Slave Dealer offers not only his boat but also to take the men off Mata Kharibu's hands. The Physician pleads that the men be put to death immediately rather than face the hellish torments to which the Slave Dealer will subject them. While the Physician, the Historian and the Slave Dealer argue amongst themselves, Mata Kharibu shouts at them for making a marketplace of his court and storms off. Just before leaving the stage he admits to the Soothsayer that he knows that the battle will be lost but he has to fight it anyway because the indications of democracy and independence among his subjects have frightened him. The Soothsayer falsely reassures him. As the King leaves the Soothsayer says men will by their nature seek power over each other, and the King cannot control this.

After the Soothsayer exits, the Physician and the Slave Dealer continue their quarrel. The latter furtively slips the Historian a bribe so that the Historian will support his

claim that he has a new boat in which the slaves can travel in comfort. The Historian does the needful. After the Slave Dealer leaves happily, the Historian invites the Physician to his house to have a glass of sherbet and to discuss the implications of the coming war which will be fought, he says, like all other wars, over nothing.

After their exit, the Court Poet enters with a canary in a gold cage. As soon as Madame Tortoise sees the bird she decides she no longer wants it. When she asks after the poet's assistant she is informed he fell—not to his death, but he did break his arm. The Court Poet's asides become more and more insulting. Madame Tortoise, who cannot hear them, says the poet bores her and should leave. She then clears the entire court except for the warrior and his guard. She tries to flirt with the warrior but he will not respond. He begs her to keep her distance otherwise he might be tempted to punish her for the evil she has brought on his men. This only encourages her further.

Madame Tortoise tries to entice the Warrior by saying that he may become King since Mata Kharibu is a fool and that he may taste untold pleasures if he yields to her. The warrior merely yells for the guard who enters following a dishevelled pregnant woman--the Dead Woman. Even before the pregnant woman can beg Madame Tortoise for mercy the latter tells the warrior that he has the choice of being made a eunuch or being sold as a slave. When the warrior does not answer Madame Tortoise orders the guard to carry out her sentence, and the pregnant woman faints. The lights go out and come on again to show Aroni and Forest Father staring at the scene.

Eshuoro strides onto the stage proclaiming that the warrior was a fool and a coward He threatens Aroni to beware of slighting him. He wants immediate redress of the assaults on him. He is convinced that his follower Oremole (Demoke's assistant on the totem pole) has been murdered. Forest Father reassures him that nothing has been forgotten. Ogun enters and tries to silence Eshuoro by saying that Demoke followed his orders and that he will answer for him. Ogun even taunts Eshuoro that Demoke has done him a favour by acting as his barber. Was he sleeping, Ogun asks, that he could not save his follower as he fell to his death? Eshuoro, goaded beyond endurance, tries to attack Ogun but Forest Father prevents him. Forest Father warns the two not to behave like spoilt humans and excite his anger. He asks Aroni to proceed. Forest Father wants the humans to "discover their own regeneration"—either to change their destructive ways or to follow the same path. Ogun begs for his servant (Demoke) to be released, but Aroni claims he needs him most of all. Eshuoro says he is impatient but Aroni says he must wait. The living ones will speak for the future themselves. When Eshuoro asks why they are so ready with a solution Forest Father says that Esuoro had thought of the same remedy and hence came himself and would not allow any others to come in his place. Forest Father asks for the questioner to be called and orders that none interrupt the proceedings.

There is a change of scene, and in the damp and drizzly atmosphere the Questioner asks the Dead Woman who sent her and why she came before her time. The Dead Woman replies that a woman without a womb sent her and as for the reason, she wants to ask that of Forest Father. The Questioner says she should not have come but lived to rear the child in her womb. The woman answers that she was weak. The Questioner asks her if the woman without a womb was also weak like her. The Forest Father is more gentle with her. He asks her to rest and quieten her spirit, disordered by the suddenness of her death. He says he has news of another son who has come from very far.

The Dead Man then enters, saying he has led three lives but his first life still obsesses him. The Questioner, seeing his well-fed appearance, asks him if he has a

happy tale to tell. The man says he has been searching for Forest Father ever since they cut off his manhood because Forest Father means home and restful sleep. Forest Father calls him by his name, Mulieru, and recalls his journey by ship till he was sold as a slave for...A bottle of rum, answers the Questioner. So even though the man looks sleek and well fed, he is as well fed as a gelded pig. The Questioner accuses the man of surrendering his manhood too easily and says instead of desiring sleep he should wander even longer. Aroni enters and rips off the Questioner's mask—it is Eshuoro. He (Eshuoro) immediately runs off. Forest Father is merely amused and asks for the earthly protagonists to be called.

The Interpreter enters, leading in Demoke, Rola and Adenebi. Forest Father looks closely at the Interpreter, wondering if he has been sent by Eshuoro, but Eshuoro enters and says that he needs no slaves to carry out his plans. Aroni enters and leads off the Dead Woman on Forest Father's orders and the Interpreter masks the three humans. The masks wear the same expression—that of resigned passivity. Forest Father announces the moment of the welcome of the dead. The Dead Woman enters, no longer pregnant, but leading the Half-Child by the hand. For each spirit that is called, one of the three humans becomes agitated. As the Spirit of the Palm speaks, saying how his colour has changed from white to red and how those guilty will be punished, the Half-Child turns around, trying to guess which of the masked figures has spoken. Then the child leaves his mother's hand and plays a game of "sesan" while a Figure in Red dogs his footsteps. When the child appeals for help no one responds. The child chants that he fears he will be born dead. The Spirit of Darkness then joins in with the Spirit of the Palm saying how "they'll be misled" and doomed. The Spirit of Precious Stones says how he lures them into the pit promising wealth but gives them death instead. The Spirit of the Pachyderms complains of the theft of ivory, and the Spirit of the Rivers weeps for humans' ruthless exploitation of their natural environment out of greed. The Spirit of the Sun complains of untimely eclipse, and the Spirit of Volcanoes says that he is winded and unable to belch lava. The Ant Leader complains of millions of his brothers being trod underfoot even though they guard the wisdom of Mother Earth. All the ants speak up, complaining of the destruction that follows in the wake of "progress"--"the good to come." Aroni shouts and asks them for what unfortunate future they rise to speak. As the ants vanish, the Figure in Red confronts Forest Father who unwillingly gestures at the Interpreter for the humans to be unmasked and to see with their human eyes.

As the humans are unmasked the first of the Triplets enters--it is a gangling, headless figure that proclaims that it is the End that will justify the Means--if anyone finds the Means, that is. As the Interpreter dances with it, the Second Triplet enters, an overblown, drooling head. It says it is "the Greater Cause," excusing all the present's crimes for the illusion of a better tomorrow. The Interpreter dances with both the Triplets and then the Second Triplet, after sniffing at them, asks who the humans are. Forest Father calls them "weak, pitiable criminals," and terms the Triplets "perversions" born of the power the corrupt hold over each other. The fanged and bloody Third Triplet then enters and says that it is Posterity, nourished by blood and violence.

As the Figure in Red rips off its hood, Eshuoro is revealed. He tries to catch the Half-Child but Ogun prevents him and says that he has no right to claim him because he played too many roles for his own good. Telling Eshuoro to beware of the mask "lined with scorpions," Ogun exits. Eshuoro once more tries to get the Half-Child who moves to his mother saying he has found an egg as smooth as a pebble. Eshuoro gleefully chants that a serpent that will swallow him will be born of that egg. The Half-Child spins around till he is giddy. As he chants his fear the Dead Woman joins him in his chant saying she too fears the loss of another child.

Then a long section follows which is completely without words in which Eshuoro and Ogun both try to get the Half-Child by playing a game of "ampe." The Interpreter, throws off his mask and reveals himself as Eshuoro's Jester, and the Third Triplet also join in. Eshuoro and the Third Triplet throw the Half-Child between them, trying to catch him on the point of two knives like circus acrobats. Demoke rushes forward to intercept the child as the deadly game continues, but Eshuoro tricks him. Ogun then comes in, pulls the Interpreter aside, catches the Half-Child and passes him to Demoke. Demoke is confused as all the others watch him. He attempts to restore the child to its mother, but Eshuoro blocks his way and appeals to Forest Father. Ogun appeals against him.

Forest Father then makes his longest speech, more to himself than to the other characters, saying that he will be troubled no further by the follies of his creations. He knows it is futile to teach humans the wickedness of their ways and to show them a picture of their lost innocence. He cannot intervene in earthly affairs, but if he does not continue to teach humans he will be accused of being ineffectual. He keeps hoping against hope that his labour will not be in vain. He asks Aroni if Demoke knows the meaning of his act. Aroni tells Demoke that he holds a doomed thing in his hands and that he cannot reverse a deed that happened many years past.

Once again there is a dumb show where Demoke gives the Half-Child to the Dead Woman who leaves with him. Forest Father too leaves, whereupon Eshuoro yells in triumph and rushes off stage, followed by his jester. The Triplets follow, grinning from ear to ear.

A silhouette of Demoke's totem is seen, with the villagers dancing around it. There is no contact between the villagers and the three human protagonists. The Jester enters with a leap, puts the sacrificial basket on Demoke's head and performs a wild dance. Eshuoro enters with a club and he and the jester relentlessly try to drag Demoke to the totem. Rola and Adenebi, as if in a trance, are made to sprinkle libation on the scene. Demoke fades and reappears at the foot of his totem. He begins to climb it and disappears from view to the beat of the drums. Eshuoro sets fire to the tree with a brand. Ogun enters and catches Demoke as he falls. The lights go out. As the lights come on gradually Eshuoro is shown frenziedly dancing with his jester. Dawn is breaking. Ogun enters carrying Demoke. He is armed. Ogun puts Demoke down on the ground, leaves his weapons beside him and flees. Eshuoro flees after his jester as the first of the beaters enters. It is now full dawn. Agboreko and the Old Man enter, a drunk Murete dragging them on. The Old Man rushes towards Demoke his son who opens his eyes.

The Old Man asks Demoke what he has seen. Agboreko asks him to leave Demoke alone, saying the truth will be out in due time. The Old Man tells Demoke that he had searched for him all night knowing that one of his companions was the infamous Madame Tortoise; she is the one who never dies, adds Agboreko. The Old Man says he was also bothered by the identity of the fourth companion whom he could not place. He sees that there are only three of them, and he asks Demoke if the fourth revealed himself. Demoke says the fourth companion was Forest Father himself. Agboreko says that they thought it might have been Eshuoro. The Old Man asks Demoke if he saw the lame one, and says how stupid they were to think that they could pit their wits against Aroni (the lame one). Agboreko says they paid a high price for their newly-acquired wisdom and the Old Man shows the injury on his face and says that behind every sapling that hit them in the forest there was Aroni's hand. Demoke wonders if they could take Murete's help in finding their way out of the forest. The Old Man speaks of the sacrifices that have been made and the expiation asked for, but Demoke feels the three have suffered enough in this one

night as they relived their past lives. The Old Man eagerly asks if there was a "kernel of light" in all their suffering, some grain of wisdom, some faint ray of hope. Rola enters at this point, looking chastened. As Agboreko says he did not expect to find her alive, even though Madame Tortoise has the reputation of outlasting them all, Demoke asks him not to call Rola that because they have all been changed by the rigours of that night. Agboreko eagerly asks him if he has learned anything wise, anything of the future, but the play ends with Agboreko's old, trite, tired cliché, "Proverb to bones and silence."

3.4 LET US SUM UP

This unit gives a detailed summary of the play under three headings, Part One, Part Two and the Play-Within-a-Play. The first part of the play introduces the three chief (living) characters, Demoke, Rola, Adenebi and the mysterious Obaneji, tells us about the festival of the Gathering of the Tribes that they are about to attend, and also the two (dead) characters who have been summoned to this festival and yet are not made at all welcome by the living characters. We are told about the magnificent totem pole which has been erected for the festival. The atmosphere is one of mystery and confusion. We get the sense that each character has a secret which he/she wants to hide from the others. We also get the sense that the four living characters are very different from one another--their constant bickering also attests to this fact. We are also introduced to two other characters, the Old Man and Agboreko, who are in search of the four living characters for different reasons and yet keep missing them.

In Part Two there is a confrontation between Murete and Eshuoro: the latter seeks vengeance because his tree has been violated and his follower killed in the construction of the totem pole. Murete refuses to co-operate and to tell him where to find the culprit.

The Play-Within-a-Play takes the action back many centuries to the court of Mata Kharibu. The four living characters now play new roles in this court and the two dead characters are presented as a heroic warrior and his hapless pregnant wife who are both wronged by Mata Kharibu and his sensuous and remorseless consort, Madame Tortoise. The play-within-a-play is Soyinka's way of presenting the fact that old sins cast long shadows. He seems to be saying that there are a number of cruel and bloody acts of injustice in Nigeria's past that the newly-independent Nigerians would do well to remember so that they do not commit the same grievous errors of judgment all over again.

The play then returns to the present with a tremendous amount of spectacle. Eshuoro has finally caught up with his quarry and he thirsts for vengeance. Ogun tries to protect Demoke, his follower. A number of spirits, of the forests, of the palm, of the rivers etc. appear and speak of the ways in which they have been exploited by human greed to the Questioner (who is actually Eshuoro in a mask) and the Interpreter. There is a game played with the Half-Child in which Demoke tries to rescue the child and restore it to its mother, the Dead Woman. Forest Father makes a long speech, mostly to himself, about the futility of trying to teach humans the folly of their deeds. Demoke climbs the totem pole as an act of expiation for the sins of the community even though he knows he will spin off it to his death. Sure enough, he falls--but he is saved by Ogun. The play ends with the Old Man and Agboreko questioning Demoke as to what he has seen and learnt from the events of the night, but Demoke is unable to explain.

3.5 GLOSSARY

Plethora: excessive fullness

Gelded: castrated

Expiation: payment of penalty, making amends for

Amass: accumulate

Cliche: phrase used too frequently

Dishevelled: untidy

Disreputable: not respectable

Flirtatious: behaviour that invites or pays attention merely for amusement.

Flogger: one who beats with a whip

Futile: useless

Goad: torment; urge someone by annoyance to do something

Incinerate: burn

Platitude: very ordinary remark, usually solemnly spoken

Scribe: writer, keeper of records

Totem Pole: pole with image of natural object, especially animal, assumed to be emblem (visual sign) of clan or individual.

Trousseau: brides clothes

Vulnerable: open to injury

3.6 QUESTIONS

Q.1 What is the significance of the play-within-a-play?
Q.2 Why does Soyinka have the characters, Demoke, Rola, Adenebi, Agboreko, the Old Man, the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, play double roles?
Q.3 What is the significance of Demoke trying to rescue the Half-Child and of climbing the totem pole?

UNIT 4 CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON *A DANCE OF THE FORESTS*

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Things To Be Kept In Mind
4.2 Issues
4.3 Structure
4.4 Character
4.5 Language
4.6 Non-Verbal Techniques
4.7 Western Influences on the Play
4.8 Soyinka and Poscoloniality
4.9 The Politics of English
4.10 Soyinka's Nativism
4.11 Soyinka's Obscurity
4.12 Let Us Sum Up
4.13 Glossary
4,14 Questions
4.15 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we have a detailed critical analysis of the play under the sub-headings 'issues,' 'structure,' 'character,' 'language' and 'non-verbal techniques.' This unit also analyses the evidence of western influences at work in this play. The last four parts of this unit deal with Soyinka's relation to postcoloniality, the politics of his decision to use English rather than any Yoruba language, his possible nativism and the charge of obscurity that is levelled against some of his work, *A Dance of the Forests* being no exception.

4.1 THINGS TO BE KEPT IN MIND

There are a number of things that have to be kept in mind while studying this play. The first is that all our knowledge of western canonical drama, the drama of Sophocles, of Shakespeare and of Shaw, must be seen as being of very limited relevance to this play.

Soyinka is well aware of the western dramatic tradition as a result of his Nigerian education and his higher studies in Leeds, but he is also consumed by the need to write African drama, be it in a language foreign to it--English. He sets himself the formidable task of incorporating Yoruba drama, developed as it is from religious ritual, and Yoruba music and dance with a language that is foreign to it. He also alters the traditional western concept of the well-made play. Notions of a three or five act structure, of a linear development of the plot, of characterisation that is dynamic and inherently consistent, of the arousal of certain emotions that are suitable to a certain genre of drama (i.e., pity and fear for tragedy, laughter and

good-humoured tolerance for comedy) none of these are seen as crucial to the type of drama that Soyinka is creating.

What Soyinka does see as important is conveying the Yoruba world view, which he sees as very different from the western world view, to his audience. Some of the aspects of this world view, as discussed in earlier units, include an irreverent, casual and friendly attitude towards the gods, the lack of a sense of remoteness from eternal beings, a widespread tolerance towards people of other faiths, a respectful attitude towards ones ancestors, and a sense of there being more to life than merely the physical or material or even visible. At the same time, Soyinka acknowledges that there is something in the figures of Yoruba religion and myth, there is something in the complicated details of Yoruba ritual that find expression in Yoruba drama to which even non-Yoruba, indeed, non-African audiences can relate. This he sees as a type of consciousness that lies beneath the layers of cultural and social and political conditioning we receive.

Now, we may agree or disagree with this viewpoint. Indeed, a number of contemporary critics have criticised Soyinka for what they call his "nativism." "Nativism," as defined by Edward Said, is the tendency to "leave the historical world for the metaphysics of essences...in a word, to abandon history" ("Yeats and Decolonisation" 38). That is, in a nutshell, to privilege metaphysics over history. Anyway, we shall discuss this debate at greater length at the end of the critical commentary.

4.2 ISSUES

Some of the issues of this play are a) Nigerian independence b) the relation of tradition to history c) the relation of the artist to politics

a) Nigerian Independence

This play was performed as part of the celebrations of Nigerian independence. Franz Fanon effectively describes the drama of decolonisation:

> Decolonisation never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself. (28)

In this play the three living characters, Demoke, Rola and Adenebi, in a way go through this process of decolonisation, exemplifying in microcosm what Nigeria has to undergo on a macrocosmic scale. When we meet them they are only too willing to protect their own skins and to blame others rather than themselves for their woes. Demoke lies about killing Oremole, Rola shrugs off the death of two of her paramours, Adenebi denies any responsibility in the lorry accident that was caused by a government official accepting a bribe and resulted in seventy people being burned to death. However, in the process of reliving history Rola is chastened and Demoke confesses his guilt, helps restore the Half-Child to its mother and undergoes the expiation ritual of climbing the totem pole even though it may result in his death.

Characters who were willing to stay on the periphery now come centre stage, as Fanon predicted.

This is the positive side of decolonisation. However, Soyinka does not want to present a uniformly enthusiastic and optimistic play, signalling that by becoming independent, all of Nigeria's political ills were ended. In a 1993 interview he tells 'Biyi Bandele-Thomas how shocked he was to meet the ministers of Independent Nigeria:

> Within five minutes, I knew that we were in serious trouble. It was clear that they were more concerned with the mechanisms for stepping into the shoes of the departing colonial masters, enjoying the same privileges, inserting themselves in that axial position towards the rest of the community. I saw the most naked and brutal signs of alienation of the ruler from the ruled, from the very first crop. There were one or two exceptions, of course. And then I realised that the enemy within was going to be far more problematic than the external, easily recognisable enemy. (Maja-Pearce 145)

It is in this frame of mind that Soyinka begins composing *A Dance of the Forests*.

In the beginning of the play we are told that all the people are going to an important festival, the ritual gathering of the tribes. This play, as mentioned earlier, is modelled on the Yoruba New Year festival which takes place in March and which includes purificatory rites in which people help one another to confess and to begin the new year afresh. The occasion of Nigerian independence would also be the beginning of a new era, a fresh start. This play was first performed as part of the Nigerian independence celebrations. This celebration is one in which people from the past have also been invited. As mentioned in the earlier section on Yoruba religion, ancestors are crucial to the Yoruba world view because they are seen as links between the mortal and the immortal gods. They can intervene on behalf of the mortals. However, in this play, the living characters neither recognise nor offer help to the Dead Man and the Dead Woman who have invited to the festivities. In fact, a number of characters say that the wrong people have been invited to the festival. In fact, they reject them outright. This shows that the living characters are unable to distinguish between the good and the evil characters in history and that they do not want to accept their contribution in the cycle of historical injustice. The brave warrior who fought against the tyranny of Mata Kharibu (who reappears as the Dead Man) and his helpless, pregnant wife (who reappears as the Dead Woman) can hardly be termed thieves and traitors.

The identification, "the enemy within" in Soyinka's phrase, is shown to be problematic through the ruse of having the element of the masquerade. As in crime fiction, in this play too not everyone is what they purport to be. The Old Man fears that Eshuoro is in disguise among the group of four living characters in order to wreak vengeance on his son, Demoke, who is in hiding after killing his apprentice. Adenebi is in some way responsible for the lorry accident that killed sixty-five people but wants to evade responsibility. Thus although the four living characters want to flee the society of the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, it is really each other they ought to avoid. The enemy is within their circle, within themselves. They have to acknowledge their own culpability, instead of putting the blame on something or someone external. Soyinka underlines the fact that the enemy lies within by having the four living characters, double up as four characters in the past in the court of Mata Kharibu. Rola becomes Madame Tortoise, Adenebi the Historian, Agboreko the Soothsayer and Demoke the Court Poet. Perhaps Soyinka is suggesting, in the context of the independence of Nigeria, that there is no point in putting all the blame

on the colonial power and believing that Nigeria will be magically cured of all her ills once she is independent.

b) The relation of tradition to history

By having the four living characters double as in the play-within-a-play in Part Two, Soyinka is perhaps saying that history repeats itself in the most distressing way. Human nature is only fitfully able to ameliorate itself, to learn from its own mistakes. The warrior and his wife who made the supreme sacrifice of their lives are not welcomed or celebrated in the new age--they are treated with suspicion or indifference or their identity is misrepresented. Madame Tortoise is a type of shallow and flirtatious woman who uses her sexual charms in a completely ruthless and self-seeking way--she is quite content to let men risk their lives trying to rescue her canary from a rooftop. The absurdity of the request--canaries are birds and so have no need of being rescued from heights; a bird's life is far more important than a human being's--underlines the callousness of the character. Rola, among the living characters, displays the same self-seeking ways. She feels she is irresistible to all men--any man who resists her must necessarily be less than a man.

c) The relation of the artist to society

We have seen through our discussion of Soyinka's political activism that he did not believe in the artist living in an ivory tower and composing works that had no relevance to society. Apparent in almost all Soyinka's major plays is the belief, that art can make a difference to society and that the artist has an extremely crucial role to fulfil--he/she cannot avoid his/her responsibility of exposing social ills.

In a number of Soyinka's plays there is an artist or a craftsman figure. In *A Dance of the Forests* this figure is Demoke. We are told that he is a carver (and in the court of Mata Kharibu he appears as a poet)--he has been responsible for carving the totem pole for the festival of the gathering of the tribes. Demoke has pushed his apprentice Oremole to his death from the top of the pole. This act has come about partly because of the vertigo Demoke feels once he climbs high. However, at the end Demoke pays the price for his deed by trying to save the Half-Child from Eshuoro. He climbs the totem with the sacrificial basket clamped on his head by Eshuoro's jester and spins off the top, only to be saved by Ogun, the patron of carvers and iron workers. Critics have pointed out that Demoke, like the hero of *The Strong Breed*, has to go through a purification ritual in which a strong sense of African tradition will help him only if it is coupled with a sense of self, of accepting a challenge, of facing one's fears. In this purificatory ritual the character always runs the risk of death. Once it is accomplished, however, whether the character survives or dies, the entire community undergoes a change. In *A Dance of the Forests* the gain seems to be a recognition of the history and an attempt to reconcile the past with the present and to knit the two together, rather than deny or falsify the past, which was what was happening at the beginning of the play with the rejection of the Dead Man and the Dead Woman. The figure of Forest Father too may be identified with the artist in general and with Soyinka the playwright in particular, but I discuss this resemblance later.

4.3 STRUCTURE

The structure of this play has nothing in common with the usual five-act structure of traditional western drama. It is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the adventures of the characters as they get to know one another and, led by Forest

Father himself, disguised as Adenebi, move towards the forest and the celebration of the gathering of the tribes. At the same time Ogun and Eshuoro are on the lookout for Demoke. Murete is forced by both to reveal all that he knows. The Old Man, Demoke's father, and Agboreko, both try to find Demoke and save him. In this scenario, the invited guests from the past, the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, are ignored by all the characters. The second part takes us in a flashback to the court of Mata Kharibu where the characters we have already been introduced to double up as characters from the past--apart from, of course, the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, who play themselves as they were when they lived, the brave warrior and his pregnant wife. However, after the scenes from the court of Mata Kharibu, the dramaturgy becomes a little confused as we have a succession of different choruses, the spirits, the ants, and the masque of the Triplets. Disguise and masquerade take the place of regular story telling, and the story does not really move forward. The tempo relaxes, only to pick up again as Demoke intervenes in the game of ampe to restore the Half-Child to its mother and to undergo the expiation ritual of climbing the totem pole. Dawn breaks, Ogun leaves, Eshuoro and his jester flee, and Agboreko and the Old Man come across Demoke and hear a little of the happenings of that strange night. The play is thus part reality, part something beyond material reality as we know it, part ritual, part straightforward narrative. The movement is circular, to a certain extent, to suggest the cycle of sin that is carried on from the days of Mata Kharibu to the present and which is hopefully broken by Demoke's selfless act of expiation on behalf of the entire community.

What is striking about the structure is the contrast Soyinka sets up between the past and the present, between the living and the dead, between sombre or chilling moments and between moments of light-hearted tomfoolery. Femi Osofisan describes how the sumptuous spectacle in a Soyinka play alternates with "moments of dark caricature," and "electric caves of tension yielded to open planes of laughter and celebration" (Maja-Pearce 48). Such contrast may be seen in Part One of the play in the juxtaposition of the comic baiting of Murete by Ogun with the anxiety of the Old Man searching for his son and the darker and more secretive interaction of the four characters, Demoke, Rola, Adenebi and Obaneji, in the forest.

4.4 CHARACTER

In characterisation too Soyinka uses the method of contrast. In all his plays there are characters who are strong, fecund, full of spirit, never at a loss for words, and not always moral or trustworthy. They defend the right to life and to joy. They are Ogunian characters, "alloys of contradictory essences" like the god Ogun as Femi Osofisan puts it, who are both creative and destructive, both unscrupulous and brave, both fierce and gentle. Demoke, Rola, and, to a lesser degree, Murete, fall into this category. Sometimes the characters grow and are chastened as a result of their experiences. This happens to both Demoke and Rola. In opposition to this group are the more stuffy, serious characters. completely lacking a sense of humour, and often full of the sense of their own importance. They are the embodiments of sterility, emptiness, parsimony. They are men of order, order that stunts, curbs and cripples. Invariably these characters are outwitted by the former group. Agboreko and Adenebi and even the Old Man to a certain extent fall into this category. Lastly there are the demagogues who are obsessed and blinded by a lust for power, power at all costs. Mata Kharibu is the obvious example of this, as is Eshuoro. Eshuoro's negative energy which is directed only at vengeance, is contrasted with Ogun and Forest Father's more compassionate and forgiving stance. Unlike Eshuoro, they seek to understand, to give humans the benefit of the doubt, not merely to condemn and to punish.

Soyinka himself admits that Ogun is not really a character but a force or a principle, even though he makes his only appearance in Soyinka's plays here. He tells Ulli Beier that through Ogun he wants to refer to "the mystery of creativity itself":

> ...which is almost a dare, a challenge of nature secrecies. One goes out almost in the same way in which Ogun cleared the jungle--because he had forged the metallic instrument. He is very much the explorer. The artist is in many ways similar; each time, he discovers a proto world in gestation: it's almost like discovering another world in the galaxy. The artist's view of reality creates an entirely new world. Into that world he leads a raid; he rifles its resources and returns to normal existence. The tragic dimension of that is one of disintegration of the self in a world which is being reborn always, and from which the artists can only recover his being by an exercise of sheer will power. He disintegrates in the passage into that world. He loses himself and only the power of the will can bring him back. And when he returns from the experience, he is imbued with new wisdoms, new perspectives, a new way of looking at phenomena.

Soyinka continues, "I was using Ogun very much as an analogue: what happens when one steps out into the unknown? There is a myth about all the gods setting out, wanting to explore and rediscover the world of mortals. But then the primordial forest had grown so thick, no one could penetrate it. Then Ogun forged the metallic tool and cut a way through the jungle. But the material for the implement was extracted from the primordial barrier." "This I took," Soyinka concludes, "as a kind of model of the artist's role, the artist as a visionary explorer, a creature dissatisfied with the immediate reality--so he has to cut through the obscuring growth, to enter a totally new terrain of being; a new terrain of sensing, a new terrain of relationships." ("Wole Soyinka on Yoruba Religion.")

Apart from Ogun representing the artist, Demoke , who is protected by Ogun also has the qualities of the artist in him and like the artist has to undergo experiences which will leave him a new and more enlightened person. Thus he undertakes the challenge of saving the Half-Child.

4.5 LANGUAGE

There are many different kinds of speech employed by Soyinka in this play.

Apart from the ones already mentioned, Agboreko speaks like a typical village elder, relying on his proverb-filled utterances to suggest the gravity and wisdom that he sorely lacks: "proverbs to bones and silence" is a particular favourite. Adenebi speaks like a bureaucrat; his speech is as narrow and close-minded as his attitude ("We perform all the formalities.") Rola and Madame Tortoise's speech is coquettish, swiftly changing to a vicious vulgarity when they are spurned or thwarted. When Obaneji throws her off, saying, "I have a particular aversion to being mauled by women," Rola spits out, "I suppose you weren't born by one. Filth!" and later she chants,"He'll die in his bed but he'll die alone/ He'll sleep in his bed but he'll sleep alone" (21). Murete's speech is full of deliciously imaginative and uninhibited graphic insults. "You...mucus off a crab's carbuncle", he tells Eshuoro, "You stream of pus from the duct of a stumbling bat" (43). Towards the end of the play the language takes on a heightened poetic quality, befitting the dignified anguish of the Spirits of the Rivers, Volcanoes, Precious Stones, Palm, Darkness and others. Even the ant leader and his followers are given considerable time to

speak of the way in which their species has been decimated ("I am the victim of the careless stride" 68). Their voices gradually swell to represent what Franz Fanon terms the "wretched of the earth," only here it is not only the coloniser and the imperialist who is wreaking harm, but the indigenous inhabitants of the colonised land:

We are the headless bodies when
The spade of progress delves....
Down the axis of the world, from
The whirlwind to the frozen drifts,
We are the ever legion of the world,
Smitten, for--'the good to come.' (68)

4.6 NON-VERBAL TECHNIQUES

Language is not the only thing Soyinka relies on for effective theatre. Rites, rituals, gestures, music and dance are important elements that he borrows from the Yoruba tradition and incorporates into his play. Aristotle in his *Poetics* , chapter 6 (c. 330 B.C.) does mention spectacle and melody as two of the six crucial elements of tragedy (the others being plot, character, diction and thought). Spectacle and melody formed important means of arousing the emotions proper to tragedy, pity and fear, although Aristotle seems to clearly prefer them being aroused by "the very structure and incidents of the play" rather than by spectacle (chapter 14). Greek theatre certainly had more ritual, music and dance than did later centuries of western theatre. Gradually, the shift, at least in twentieth century western theatre was to words. This is something Soyinka balances out by returning to the roots of drama in ritual, gesture, music and dance. His plays are meant to be staged and seen rather than read. Femi Osofisan says it is "the mechanics of performance, the persuasive brilliance of the acting, the seductiveness of the successive spectacles" (Maja-Pearce 47-48) that remain in one's mind after the performance of a Soyinka play rather than the play's "*message.*" There is the game of ampe that the Interpreter and the Triplets play and to which the Half-Child is drawn. A seemingly innocuous children's "foot-slipping" game is given a sinister twist as we realise that if the Half-Child is carried off by any of the Triplets (one of whom is Eshuoro in disguise) or the Interpreter (Eshuoro's jester), it will not be reunited with its mother and it will once more miss a chance to be born. There is Eshuoro's wild dance as he thinks Demoke will fall to his death and the murder of his follower and Demoke's apprentice, Oremole, will be avenged. There is the expiation ritual carried out by Demoke.

Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* has some telling remarks to make on the African's very special relation to dance:

On another level we see the native's emotional sensibility exhausting itself in dances which are more or less ecstatic....The native's relaxation takes precisely the form of a muscular orgy in which the most acute aggressivity and the most impelling violence are canalized, transformed and conjured away. The circle of the dance is a permissive circle: it protects and permits. At certain times on certain days, men and women come together at a given place, and there, under the solemn eye of the tribe, fling themselves into a seemingly unorganized pantomime, which is in reality extremely systematic, in which by various means--shakes of the head, bending of the spinal column, throwing of the whole body backwards--may be deciphered as in an open book the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. (44)

Soyinka's stage directions describe Eshuoro and his jester performing a "wild dance," the "Dance of the Unwilling Sacrifice," before Demoke climbs the totem pole. In the background are the silhouettes of the villagers, also dancing (72). Eshuoro keeps on dancing, even as Ogun saves Demoke as he spins off the totem pole. Eshuoro and his jester flee from the stage only as dawn breaks and Agboreko, the Old Man and Murete enter. As a result of this ritual and this dance, knowledge comes to the living characters--knowledge of Obaneji's true charcter (he is Forest Father and not Eshuoro as Demoke's father had feared). When the Old Man speaks of sacrifice and expiation, his son bursts out, "Expiation? We three who lived many lives in this one night, have we not done enough? Have we not felt enough for the memory of our remaining lives?" (73) However, neither Demoke nor Rola, who is significantly described as "chastened" can say any more about what they have learned. The community is cleansed by this ritual, and its eyes opened, but whether the effect will be either widespread or long-lasting no one can say.

4.7 WESTERN INFLUENCES ON *A DANCE OF THE FORESTS*

As a result of Soyinka's education in Nigeria and Leeds and his work in London, Soyinka was intimate with the western dramatic tradition. We can see some influences of this tradition, faint though they are, in *A Dance of the Forests*. They are faint because of Soyinka's determination to bring the Yoruba world view and Yoruba drama to the notice of the world.

When the Spirits and the Half-Child speak, their utterances are very much like choric passages in the Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles:

> Half-Child: I who yet await a mother
> Feel this dread,
> Feel this dread,
> I who flee from womb
> To branded womb, cry it now
> I'll be born dead
> I'll be born dead....
>
> Spirit of Darkness: More have I seen, I, Spirit of the Dark,
>
> Naked they breathe within me, foretelling now....
> Half-Child:...Branded womb, branded womb...
> Spirit of the Palm: White skeins wove me.
> Spirit of the Darkness: Peat and forest....
> Half-Child: Branded womb, branded womb. (64-65)

The Half-Child is reminiscent of the apparition of the bloody child the witches conjure up in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*_ IV. I. 77ff , to signify the "unnatural" or Caesarian birth of Macduff. The character of Murete seems to be a combination of the two creatures in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*_, Ariel and Caliban. Forest Father's role in getting the four living characters together and thereby setting in motion the cycle of sin and expiation is reminiscent of the character Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* . It is he who manufactures the illusion of a shipwreck in order to set right past wrongs and reclaim his lost dukedom. The mood of Prospero's speech, "I have bedimm'd/ The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds....But this rough

magic/ I here abjure;" (V. i. 41ff)is echoed in Forest Father's speech towards the end of the play, where he speaks more to himself than to the other characters:

> Trouble me no further. The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden--to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness--knowing full well, it is all futility. (71)

There is one important distinction to be made here, though. While Prospero makes a number of references to grace, to prayer and to "heavenly music," Forest Head does no such thing. Soyinka creates the impression that there is no higher deity on whom Forest Father depends. The Christian world view does not enter *A Dance of the Forests,* unless one wants to see a likeness between Demoke's sacrifice on behalf of the community and the sacrifice of Jesus.

Just as Prospero is often identified with Shakespeare (an artist too is a sort of magician) and his words ("But this rough magic/ I here abjure;...I'll drown my book" V. i. 50ff) identified with Shakespeare's valediction to the Elizabethan stage (*The Tempest* is believed to be his last play), so here we can see a link between Forest Father and Soyinka. In fact, Soyinka played the role of Forest Father in one of the first productions of this play. Soyinka too creates creatures whose "fooleries" distress him. Even though he knows that "nothing is ever altered," and history repeats the same follies and crimes and human beings are rarely the wiser for experience, like Forest Father he too must persist in his endeavour to pierce the audience's layers of "soul-deadening habit" with his plays.

4.8 SOYINKA AND POSTCOLONIALITY

Sub-Saharan Africa seems to be in a sorry state. Civil wars, social strife, a succession of military dictatorships, economic stagnation, natural catastrophes such as famines and droughts leading to large-scale epidemics--all these do not make for ideal living conditions, to say the least. However, Africa's colonial past continues to be an important factor of the present-day malaise. What Crow and Banfield term "the disruption of African history" by the European imperialists is a crucial cause of the current chaos. As we have seen in the formation of Nigeria, these African countries were artificial creations by the imperialist powers who often cared little about the range of languages, cultures and religions they were grouping together as a result of these artificially imposed national boundaries. Disruptive ethnic rivalry, economies crippled by imperialist demands, large-scale foreign debt--all these are crutches which few countries can outgrow in order to develop in a healthy manner. These are conditions in which few would expect the arts to flourish, but paradoxically it is these African countries that have produced the works of writers as diverse as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Hubert Ogunde, Ama Ata Aidoo, and, of course, Wole Soyinka. One crucial way in which colonialism did not affect Africa was that it did not succeed in completely erasing indigenous culture from the continent. The celebration of seasonal rituals, of the New Year, of Ogun mysteries, of folk and travelling theatre (such as that of Hubert Ogunde, Baba Sala or the Ghanaian Concert Party), the wealth of the oral tradition (as used by J.P. Clark in *Ozidi* and Efua Sutherland in *The Marriage of Anansewa*), the reinterpretation and recuperation of past history and tradition (as in Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*)-- all these are alive and kicking for the African writers to reject or accept or blend into existing western artistic traditions. And it is to Soyinka's credit that he has been among the

most innovative to blend existing Yoruba myth, ritual, festivities and celebrations along with elements of popular theatre in his drama that is written in the language of the imperialist--English.

An important distinction that Franz Fanon makes between colonisation and decolonisation and one which I think Soyinka tries to illustrate in his play is the fact that with decolonisation individualism should be ideally replaced by a sense of the community.

Fanon writes,

> The native intellectual had learnt from his [colonial] masters that the individual ought to express himself fully. The colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the native's mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought. Now the native who has the opportunity to return to the people during the struggle for freedom will discover the falseness of this theory. The very forms of organization of the struggle will suggest to him a different vocabulary. Brother, sister, friend--these are words outlawed by the colonialist bourgeoisie, because for them my brother is my purse, my friend is part of my scheme for getting on. (36)

In the first part of *A Dance of the Forests* Demoke and Rola are obsessed with saving their own skins and have no sense of solidarity. It is Forest Father disguised as Obaneji who keeps stopping their squabbles and reminding them that they must get on with one another. However, at the end of the second part Demoke willingly risks his life to undergo the expiation ritual on behalf of the community. When his father talks of expiation at the end of the play his reply is significant:

Expiation? We three who lived many lives in this one night, have we not done enough? Have we not felt enough for the memory of our remaining lives? (73)
Note that he speaks not of himself alone but of Rola, Adenebi and himself--"we three"--of the community, in short, not of the individual.

4.9 THE POLITICS OF ENGLISH

The language that Soyinka uses, English, and his decision to stay in self-imposed exile in the United States are issues which continue to excite criticism. Ngugi wa Thiong'o made the landmark decision to write only in his own Gikuyu rather than English because he felt this would best address the needs of his people. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi writes,

> ...it is precisely when writers open out African languages to the real links in the struggles of peasants and workers that they will meet their biggest challenge. For to the comprador-ruling regimes, their real enemy is an awakened peasantry and working class. A writer who tries to communicate the message of revolutionary unity and hope in *the languages of the people* becomes a subversive character....For him there are no 'national' accolades, no new year honours, only abuse and slander...from the mouths of the armed power of a ruling minority--ruling, that is, on behalf of U.S.-led imperialism--and who see democracy as a real threat. A democratic participation of the people in the shaping of their own lives or in discussing their own lives in languages that allow for mutual comprehension is seen as being dangerous to the good government of a country and its institutions.

> African languages addressing themselves to the lives of the people become the enemy of a neo-colonial state. (30)

Ngugi, writing exclusively in Gikuyu, does this; Soyinka living in the U.S. in self-imposed exile and writing in English does not. Although in some of his writings and interviews Soyinka is as outspoken as Franz Fanon about the atrocities of imperialism (see his Nobel Prize acceptance speech which I have quoted earlier, for example), it is also true that Soyinka wants to open the eyes of his fellow Nigerians to the atrocities they are committing both politically and socially. To him, colonialism is not a catch-all for all the ills of his country. Also, it is obvious that Soyinka does not want to lose his western reading public by not writing in English. His aim seems to be to spread knowledge of Yoruba culture and civilisation outside Africa rather than to address the Nigerian peasant or worker in Yoruba. He did boast that the ones who came to see *A Dance of the Forests* night after night were the cooks and cleaners who worked on the Ibadan campus rather than "Dr. PhD, or Lawyer LLB or Minister MHR" with their European-style expectations of the well-made play. However, the fact remains that Soyinka by writing in English is definitely giving less to those Nigerians who know only Yoruba. All they would get from his plays would be the non-verbal element, (and I am not denying that this is a powerful part of his plays), but not the whole effect.

In *Decolonising the Mind* Ngugi writes,

> The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement....It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves....It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency, and a collective death-wish. (3)

Not for a moment am I saying that Soyinka's own situation is typified by these lines. But it is true that any faith he may have had in Yoruba has definitely been eroded. I am not denying that he and his family have not been harassed by political regimes in Nigeria. Details of such harassment are outlined by him in the 1993 interview he gave to 'Biyi Bandele-Thomas. But the fact remains that despite the Abubakar regime's pardon and withdrawal of all charges of treason against him (by the former dictator, Sani Abacha) has been effected (October 1998), he is still not ready to return home.

4.10 SOYINKA'S NATIVISM

Soyinka relates to what Said calls "nativism," that is, a tendency to "leave the historical world for the metaphysics of essences...in a word, to abandon history," which I have summarised earlier as the tendency to prefer metaphysics over history. In other words, nativism is a tendency to be more interested in seeing certain essential traits being enacted age after age, in civilisation after civilisation, rather than to show how contingent the forces of history are, to prefer philosophical generality over historical specificity. These are factors that critics and intellectuals,

particularly those belonging to the younger generation of Nigeria such as Biodun Jeyifo, hold against Soyinka. It is true that Soyinka has gone on record to say that specific historical incidents like the independence of Nigeria or Nigeria's history as a colonised country do not obsess him (see his comments on *A Dance of the Forests* in a 1966 interview in *Spear* where he says that the play was "not a play about the Nigerian situation; it was the general thing" or the Author's Note *to Death and the King's Horseman* where he denies that the play is about the "clash of cultures." How can it be, he argues, when Pilkings was not a summation of British or European culture but a distortion of it. So, in effect, there weren't two cultures in the play but only one) However, one should not overinterpret these remarks. A person who ignores history cannot possibly bring to bear the knowledge of a number of incidents in Nigeria's past as does Soyinka in play after play. One has only to read *A Dance of the Forests* or *Death and the King's Horeseman* or *Kongi's Harvest* to see that he draws many of the incidents of his plays from actual historical events. Morcover, in his relentless critique of tyranny and injustice he does not let anyone off the hook. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, it would be much simpler to lay the blame on the District Officer, Simon Pilkings, and leave it at that. Instead, Soyinka does the more subtle thing of having Elesin himself partially responsible for his doom. One suspects that the supporters of the 'Soyinka as a nativist' cause are unwilling to be termed politically incorrect and thus do the fashionable thing--damn the playwright for ignoring history when in fact he pays close attention to it. The only thing one can rightfully claim is that Soyinka has the tendency to distil messages of universal humanist significance from the very contingent events of history. He does not give due respect to the contingent nature of history. But to say that he ignores history would be a misrepresentation.

4.11 SOYINKA'S OBSCURITY

For all its merits, *A Dance of the Forests* is a flawed creation. It is difficult to sort out, especially towards the end of Part Two, what Soyinka is driving at. The passages in which the different spirits speak of the way in which they have been exploited sound too long-drawn out. Part One and those sections of part Two which deal with the court of Mata Kharibu are well worked out and gripping theatre. However, the intensity seems to diminish somewhat with the extended chorus of the spirits, the chorus of the ants and the masque of the triplets. The end, from the moment the characters start playing ampe, is, once again, very gripping and intense.

When unfavourable reviews appeared of this play, Soyinka fought back saying that he did not mean for his creation to be completely comprehensible. He challenged the notion that any play could or should be completely "understood." He wanted to produce "exciting theatre"; he was content to "set a riddle" which would excite the audience to think for itself. The audience ought to dispense with their tutored responses and expectations; instead they ought to respond to the rhythms and the moods of the play. His plays ought to be felt "through the pores of the skin." This is all very well, but one cannot help feeling that the effectiveness of the play as well as the playwright's intention of making a difference to society cannot be best served by obscurity. This is of course not to diminish the enormous courage of conviction Soyinka has shown in his work and his unremitting efforts to make art be a vehicle of social change, of the removal or at least the lessening of human obtuseness, of the hope he expresses time and again that life can change without being blind to its many searing anomalies and injustices. And the fact that he does this without his art sinking to the level of propaganda or becoming sickeningly sentimental is evidence of his consummate artistry.

4.12 LET US SUM UP

In the drama of Wole Soyinka we see the difficult and sometimes flawed mixing of Yoruba rituals, dramatic techniques, music and dance with a language foreign to it: English. Notions of a linear plot, psychological characterisation, the arousal of emotions peculiar to particular genres of theatre have limited relevance in the study of Soyinka's plays.

The issues explored in *A Dance of the Forests* are Nigerian independence, the relation of tradition to history and the relation of the artist to politics. In the first issue, Soyinka wants Nigerians to admit their own history of violence and injustice, take responsibility for it, and not put all the blame of the country's ills on colonisation. In the second, through the duplication of characters in the play-within-a-play, Soyinka seems to suggest that history repeats itself and human beings do not learn from their own mistakes: there is very little difference between Rola and Madame Tortoise, for example. In the third, Soyinka believes that art can make a crucial difference to society. He does not believe that the artist can remain immune to the ills of society.

The structure of this play is not like the usual three or five act structure we are used to in western drama. The play is part reality, part something beyond reality. It travels backward and forward in time and along with the doubling of characters we have other signs of circularity. This suggests that the chain of violence, injustice and retribution is carried on from generation to generation. The structure works through the contrasts Soyinka sets up between living and dead, past and present, tragedy and laughter.

The characterisation in the play does not depend on psychological realism or inner consistency or growth--all the things we expect from traditional western theatre. In characterisation too there is a contrast set up between characters who are quick-witted, sharp-tongued, witty, full of life and energy but not necessarily entirely good (Demoke, Rola, Murete) and between those characters who are embodiments of sterility, emptiness, parsimony (Agboreko, Adenebi). There is a third category: the demagogue who is obsessed with power. Mata Kharibu and Eshuoro are obvious examples of this type.

Then there are creatures like Ogun who are not really characters but more in the nature of forces or symbols, symbol of the artist as explorer, as visionary.

Language and non-verbal techniques are some of the things Soyinka employs in order to achieve his very individual dramatic effect. The language is full of wit and graphic insult; some of the stuffier characters speak stiltedly and boringly, using a number of cliched proverbs. The language at the end of the play is dignified and poetically heightened, befitting the anguish of the Spirits of the different natural elements. As for non-verbal techniques, rites, like the invitation to the dead, rituals like the climbing of the totem pole, music and dance form an intrinsic part of the dramatic effect of this play. This play gains much of its power from being staged, such is its spectacle, rather than from being read.

4.13 GLOSSARY

Expiation: Making amends for (a sin)

Nativism: To prefer metaphysics over history. In other words. to be more interested in seeing certain essential traits being enacted age after age, in civilisation after civilisation, rather than to show how contingent the forces of history are. To prefer philosophical generality over historical specificity.

4.14 QUESTIONS

Q.1. What are the ways in which Soyinka's play departs from western dramatic tradition and convention?

Q.2. What are the elements that Soyinka adopts from Yoruba ritual and drama into his play and how successful is the amalgamation of western and Yoruba elements?

Q.3. Who is a nativist? Do you agree that Soyinka is a nativist? Use material from *A Dance of the Forests* to support your answer.

Q. 4. Write a note on Soyinka's structure and characterisation in *A Dance of the Forests.*

Q.5. What sort of political statement is Soyinka making in *A Dance of the Forests* which, as you know, was performed on the occasion of Nigeria's independence?

Q.6. Is *A Dance of the Forests* an example of postcolonial theatre? Answer with close reference to the text. You may also refer to Soyinka's other writings and to the writings of Frantz Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiong'o if you so choose.

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UNIT 5 WOLE SOYINKA'S MAJOR DRAMATIC WORKS, EXCLUDING *A DANCE OF THE FORESTS*

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel*
5.2 *The Strong Breed, The Road* and *Kongi's Harvest*
5.3 *Madmen and Specialists*
5.4 *Death and the King's Horseman*
5.5 Let Us Sum Up
5.6 Glossary
5.7 Questions
5.8 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

I shall now give a brief introduction to some of Soyinka's important plays, excluding the one in our syllabus which has already been closely analysed, in order to give you, a taste of the different kinds of plays Soyinka wrote and a general sense of his oeuvre.

Femi Osofisan lists as some of Soyinka's favourite themes in his plays the following: the "wanton and cynical abuse"of political power in Africa, the malaise of widespread corruption, the curbing of individual freedom, the elusive meaning of history and the "exploration of the mythology of death" (Maja-Pearce 53). I wish to add to this the role of the artist in society and the ritual of expiation that must be undergone by a character often at the cost of his/her life in order to cleanse the community of its ills.

5.1 *THE SWAMP DWELLERS* AND *THE LION AND THE JEWEL*

His two earliest plays, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel,* although composed in the same period, 1957-58, are very different from each other. The first deals with the effect of sudden wealth on a community and on the relationships of people within that community (oil had just been discovered in marketable amounts in the Niger Delta.) The play is set in a hut raised on stilts--it is immediately clear that this is a play about people in a subsistence economy. The story is about Makuri and Alu and their twin sons, Awuchike and Igwezu. Awuchike had set off ten years before to seek his fortune in the city. He had found it but was dead to all feelings for his family. Igwezu had fulfilled his promises to his family, but he had not prospered. His crops had failed and the family priest had not kept his word about protecting him. However, Igwezu gets a bit of his own back when the shameless family priest asks him for a shave and is treated to a terrifying inquisition with the edge of a razor at his throat. The play is written in a naturalistic style and the characters are set off against one another--the responsible brother and the heartless

one, the faithful woman and the adulterous one etc. The form is flawed, expectedly, since Soyinka is learning his craft (there are far too many entrances and exits, for one thing), but the play has an emotional impact.

The idea of *The Lion and the Jewel* was apparently suggested by the fifty-plus Charlie Chaplin's marriage to the teenage daughter of the American dramatist, Eugene O' Neill, Oona. This led Soyinka to think about how a number of Yoruba chiefs had married girls young enough to be their granddaughters. The energy, wicked cunning and ability to satisfy their own lust in these chiefs is celebrated in the figure of Baroka who despite his years has no trouble in outwitting the pompous and superficially Europeanised schoolmaster Lakunle and stealing the pretty young woman Lakunle has set his heart on marrying right from under his nose. Apart from the interest in the stratagems used by Baroka, the play shines in its spirited exchange of insults and ham-handed compliments between Sidi, the young woman courted by both men, and her two admirers. Soyinka includes the stylistic innovation of including a dance drama which functions much like a play-within-a-play but in a much more spectacular fashion. This play was initially misinterpreted as presenting Yoruba society in a reactionary light. However, there is nothing static about Baroka's values and the nimbleness with which he meets every fresh challenge. Rather, it is Lakunle who appears to be a dolt, slavishly aping the west and blindly believing that all good can only come from there. Lakunle is a victim of what Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (which I referred to earlier) calls the "cultural bomb" of imperialism. The effect of this bomb is to "annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement....It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves..." (3).

5.2 *THE STRONG BREED, THE ROAD* AND *KONGI'S HARVEST*

After *A Dance of the Forests* which was written around the time of Nigeria' s independence (1960--Soyinka was twenty-five years old at the time) came the three major plays of the sixties, *The Strong Breed, The Road* and *Kongi's Harvest. The Strong Breed* tells the tragic story of Eman who is born into a family charged with carrying the evil from the community to the sea is a highly symbolic annual ritual. Eman is killed when he takes the place of a mentally disabled boy he has befriended in a village's annual purification ritual. As Eman grows from a coward who flees from dangerous situations to a hero and saviour who has the courage of his convictions, the spiritual growth of a community is also illustrated.

The Road baffled many a critic when it was first performed and is still regarded as a rather obscure play. It is about two people, Professor and Kotonu, and how their lives intersect. Professor is a corrupt swindler, Kotonu is a bewildered bus driver who took refuge after injuring the half-child Murano. In this play Soyinka combines naturalism with symbolism, popular comedy with ritual, and Shakespearean elements with elements of the absurd drama.

Soyinka said *Kongi's Harvest* was apparently inspired by a single sentence which he had once heard from the lips of an African leader, and that sentence, replete with realpolitik, threat and utter indifference to the worth of human life was--"I want him back alive, if possible." The play grows out of Soyinka's concern for political

activism, his observation of Nigerian politics, and of his concern to incorporate African festival rituals and theatre into drama written in English. *Kongi's Harvest* centres around a New Yam Festival held in the imaginary land of Isma. Kongi is the tyrant of Isma, and his repressive ways are aided by a band of sycophants and an Organizing Secretary. Kongi's rule is challenged by the supporters of the jailed Oba Danlola and by Kongi's ex-mistress. Rather than the details of the plot, which include attempts by Kongi to take over Danlola's position in the New Yam Festival and attempts to assasinate both Danlola and Kongi, it is the spectacularly staged Yam Festival, complete with music and dance, that makes an impact. In one of the performances, Soyinka himself played the part of Kongi.

5.3 *MADMEN AND SPECIALISTS*

Madmen and Specialists, Soyinka's next important play, was the only one he wrote during the Nigerian Civil War years--at this time most of his writing was in non-dramatic form. This acerbic play, with certain touches of ghoulish black comedy, is about Dr. Bero, who has been transformed by the wars: earlier he was a doctor, now he is an intelligence officer. He is aided in his sinister designs by the senior officers of the party. His father, like the figures of Greek myth and tragedy, tries to thwart their designs by serving them a feast of human flesh,(hoping thereby to fill their minds with revulsion.) The father's plan backfires: Bero and his allies develop a taste for human flesh. (In a 1993 interview Soyinka remarks that he observes a "philosophy of cannibalism in Nigeria at the moment, a ruthlessness towards each other....Corruption has become even an *exhibitionist* fact" [Maja-Pearce 157]). At the end of the play all the father's attempts at rehabilitation come to naught: he is shot by his son. The Earth Mothers who possess a great store of wisdom and wish to pass on this knowledge to safe hands burn their collection of herbs. This is an ambiguous action--thereby the herbs' power for good is destroyed, but the Earth Mothers also prevent them from falling into the wrong hands--Bero's. So some critics see this bitter and depressing play as being one not entirely bereft of hope.

5.4 *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*

The last play of Soyinka's that I will discuss was written in the period of his second exile from Nigeria--1971 to 1975. It is *Death and the King's Horseman*. The play is built around the attempted ritual suicide of the King's Horseman at Oyo in 1945. When in 1944 the Alafin of Oyo died, Jinadu, his Master of the Horse or Horseman, danced a ritual dance through the streets of Oyo as a prelude to killing himself. However, the British intervened and arrested him. Once the news of the Horseman's arrest and jailing reached his home his youngest son killed himself in place of his Jinadu. In his play, Soyinka changes the time to that of the Second World War and introduces a visit by the Prince of Wales to Nigeria. Soyinka transforms the bare bones of the historical narrative in his typical iconoclastic way--Elesin Oba, the King's Horseman, en route to committing suicide, decides he may as well leave something of himself behind for future generations. He decides to impregnate a young woman on her way to be married, despite the young woman's prospective mother-in-law, Iyaloja's, warnings. Along with the story of the Horseman is juxtaposed the tale of the British District officer and his wife, dancing a tango in egungun masquerade dress and completely unaware of the contempt they are showing to the country in which they live, more excited by the prospect of a visit by the Prince of Wales than anything going on in the African community. The two

rituals, that of the suicide and that of the welcome to the Prince of Wales, go on simultaneously, Elesin Oba's son, returned from medical school in England, rejects his father in public. Elesin is jailed, has a long conversation with the British District officer in which the latter's shallowness and Elesin's wisdom are revealed. Elesin blames the polluting "alien hand" in his land for his condition, an explanation that is immediately rejected by Iyaloja. She puts the blame squarely on Elesin's shoulders. Finally Elesin strangles himself. In this play Soyinka is successful not only in presenting the narrow-minded selfishness and ignorance of the British colonial administration but also the limitations of the Yoruba world view. Perhaps through Iyaloja's word of admonishment to Elesin, Soyinka is also hinting that some of the blame for the length and duration of colonial rule goes to the indigenous inhabitants who are not alert and responsible enough to get rid of the alien interlopers. As Soyinka said about the Gowon years in a 1993 interview, "we, the populace, wasted chances by failing to choose the right leadership when we had the chance" (Maja-Pearce 151). In the 'author's note' to the play's printed text, Soyinka says, "The colonial factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind...." So, rather than colonialism per se, it is the effect of colonialism on the indigenous inhabitants of the colonised country and how these peoples' relations with each other are undermined is Soyinka's interest. He also wants to comment on how the caretakers and authority figures within the indigenous culture are threatened and psychologically enfeebled. In this play, from the point of view of dramaturgy, many of Soyinka's earlier lapses in technique, like too many entrances and exits, a confusion about the actual story, a tendency to get carried away by dialogue, are eschewed. The structure is tight; the emotional impact considerable.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit analyses seven other plays by Soyinka written both before and after *A Dance of the Forests.* It shows how political corruption and the frailty of human nature, its susceptibility to greed, and the chance of ordinary, fallible human beings of doing something heroic is always a possibility. Soyinka does not give up on human nature, even though his critique of human failings is searing and pitiless. In a number of the plays a member of the community undergoes an expiation ritual which may or may not cost him his life in order to cleanse the community of certain ills.

The image gradually darkens--while the early play, *The Lion and the Jewel,* laughs at as well as criticises the chieftain and the vanities of foolish and westernised Lakunle, the last play discussed here, *Death and the King's Horseman,* is a sombre look at the price humans must pay for rampant corruption, greed and violence. The plays also carry an ongoing critique of colonisation without using it as an excuse for all Nigeria's ills.

5.6 GLOSSARY

Wanton: unrestrained, irresponsible
Inquisition: search, investigation

5.7 QUESTIONS

Q.1. Are there any common themes or motifs in these seven plays by Soyinka?
Q.2. Does Soyinka's vision change over the period of eighteen years that these works encompass? How so?
Q.3. Do you see any lines between *A Dance of the Forests* and the plays described here?

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MAEN-119
New Literatures In English

Block

4

Ice-Candy-Man

Block Introduction

UNIT 1
The Author : Background, Works, and of the Title 5

UNIT 2
The Narrative Voice in *Ice-Candy-Man* 21

UNIT 3
Feminist Inscriptions in *Ice-Candy-Man* 30

UNIT 4
Parsi Identity in *Ice-Candy-Man* 42

UNIT 5
***Ice-Candy-Man* as a Novel of Partition** 53

UNIT 6
Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man:* A Postcolonial Perspective 67

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In The previous block (Block 3) you read about Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. This block is devoted to Bapsi Sidhwa's extremely interesting novel entitled *Ice-Candy-Man* which is set in the politically volatile period of India's Partition in 1947.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a Parsi Zoroastrain which is one of the minority communities of our country. Inspite of their infinitesimally small number, the Parsis occupy an extraodinary position in India's recent history. Their role in the economic, social and political spheres makes them one of the most interesting of India's ethnic groups.

As is the case with most authors, their backgrounds have a direct bearing on their works. Bapsi Sidhwa is no different. For a better understanding of her novel, it is vital to understand the Parsi ethos, and to gain a historical perspective of this minority community. Therefore, **Unit 1** provides the background necessary to understand the dilemmas, identity crises and problems of the Parsi community in India as well as Bapsi Sidhwa's personal concerns. It also examines the significance of the title and the possible political connotations that occur with this unusual title.

In **Unit 2** we will see how the author effectively uses the girl-child narrator Lenny to construct the narrative from her limited apprehension of what are in reality events of great magnitude. The framework of changing patterns of communal relations, the dislocation of families and the impact of violence are all seen through the eyes of the Parsi girl-child, the polio-afflicted Lenny. In this manner, it becomes a minority perspective in more ways than one.

The issue of gender justice is examined in **Unit 3**. The pivotal role that women characters like Lenny's godmother, her mother Mrs. Sethi and 'ayah' (named Shanta but referred throughout the novel as ayah) play in this book are aptly delineated. Sidhwa in this novel shows women as victims of Partition violence but later in the novel also as saviours. The women characters in this novel challenge the reductive forces of patriarchy and colonization and the "woman-as-victim" paradigm.

In **Unit 4** we will carefully probe the Parsi ethos of this novel and the way it makes certain characters behave. The Parsi dilemma whether to support "swaraj" or remain loyal to the British rule is carefully examined. The identity crisis of this minority community is examined in two works of Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice-Candy-Man*. This is essential, as the political debate amongst the Parsis in *Ice-Candy-Man* is a sequel to the earlier novel. The change of the Parsis from neutrality to active neutrality is also probed. By active neutrality I mean that the Parsis no longer remained passive and aloof, but got involved in humanitarian causes and helped the victims of Partition. This stance developed after the Parsis decided to stay in the sub-continent, following Partition.

In the penultimate unit, **(Unit 5)** we examine this novel as belonging to the genre of the Partition novel. In this section, the Pakistani perspective on Partition, the role of Gandhi and Jinnah, the use of political leaders as allegory, the role of rumour and the impact of violence are all carefully discussed. In the final unit, **(Unit 6)** this novel will be assessed in a postcolonial perspective. In this context, it will be seen how Bapsi Sidhwa writes an alternate history to counter the British and Indian versions of the subcontinent's historical events like Partition and Independence. Also the appropriation of the English language with liberal usage of Gujarati and Urdu words and the purpose behind this kind of style will be investigated.

UNIT 1 THE AUTHOR: BACKGROUND, WORKS, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
  1.1.1 Bapsi Sidhwa's background
  1.1.2 Use of Urdu poetry
  1.1.3 Why she wrote in English
  1.1.4 How and why she became a novelist
1.2 The works of Bapsi Sidhwa
1.3 The Parsis
  1.3.1 Group identity
1.4 The Zoroastrian religion
  1.4.1 The Zoroastrian ethic
1.5 Migration to India
  1.5.1 Problems of alienation
  1.5.2 Declining numbers
1.6 Title of the text
  1.6.1 Political connotations of the title
1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 Glossary
1.9 Questions
1.10 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are threefold. Initially it is to introduce the students to Bapsi Sidhwa, the Pakistani woman novelist who is an important voice in the genre of Indo-Anglian Commonwealth fiction. Bapsi Sidhwa is a Parsi Zoroastrian and as the background of the author plays an important role in her novel, *Ice-Candy-Man,* it is essential to have a historical perspective on this minority community. So, for a better understanding of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel it is vital to understand the Parsi ethos. Finally this unit examines the significance of the title and the possible political connotations that occur with this unusual title.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Bapsi Sidhwa's background

Celebrated Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz described the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa as:

> Ruthlessly truthful, deeply perceptive, she tells her story with rare courage, frankness, and good humour. (Paranjape 82)

This is an apt assessment of the Pakistani woman novelist Bapsi Sidhwa, an important voice in the genre of commonwealth fiction. Her four novels-*TheCrow Eaters* (1978), *The Bride* (1983), *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) and *An American Brat* (1994)-reveal remarkable diversity, vision, and perception of themes which are both universal and particularly relevant to the subcontinent. However, the most striking

feature of her novels, especially *The Crow Eaters*, is her remarkable sense of humour, which is both bawdy and ironical.

Born in Karachi in 1938, in a prominent Parsi business family, the Bhandaras, the now sixty years old Bapsi is a literary figure as well as an active social worker. She divides her time between Pakistan and U.S.A. In 1991 she was awarded the *liberaturepreis* from Germany for *Ice-Candy-Man* and the *Sitara -I-Imtiaz*, the highest honour given in arts by the government of Pakistan. In 1992 she won the prestigious Lila Wallace Readers Digest award. Her novels have been translated in four languages, French, German, Russian and Urdu. In India her novels were initially published by Sangam books and are now published by Penguin. In England her novels were published by Jonathan Cape and Heinemann, and in U.S.A by Milkweed editions.

Born in Karachi in undivided India, Bapsi Sidhwa was brought up and educated in Lahore. Her marriage to Noshirwan is her second marriage. When she was nineteen years old, she fell in love and married a sophisticated Bombay businessman. The marriage did not last long. She then married Noshirwan, a respected Lahore businessman who is the son of Mr. P.K. Sidhwa, former mayor of Karachi and a renowed freedom fighter. Bapsi had earlier graduated from Lahore's Kinnaird College for women. Mother of two girls and a boy, Bapsi was initially a housewife. A sense of social guilt and concern for the poor made Bapsi participate in social work. She soon became an activist and took special interest in women's rights. She was involved in setting up the destitute women's and children's home in Lahore.

Despite her interest in social work, Bapsi was restless. She took to writing out of boredom and loneliness. She admitted later that as a typical socialite in Lahore, her life was one of unrelieved tedium. She abhorred the aimless gossip and conversation at coffee parties. So as a kind of therapy she took to writing. Reading had been a hobby since childhood. In an interview given to *The Friday Times* of 20-26 July, 1989, Bapsi admited to Jugnu Mohsin "I had polio as a child. I had to have extensive treatment, my parents were advised not to send me to school. I was tutored at home by an Anglo-Indian lady who taught me to read and write." From this interview it can be seen that the depiction of Lenny, the girl-child narrator, who also has polio in *Ice-Candy-Man*, is very autobiographical.

As a lonely child, Bapsi read copiously. Her favourite authors were Charles Dickens, P.G. Wodehouse and V.S. Naipaul. She has revealed in interviews that her favourite books were *Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens which she read six times and Naipaul's A *House for Mr Biswas*. As she grew up she came to admire the works of Leo Tolstoy. The influence of her favourite novelists is evident in the writings of Bapsi Sidhwa. Her novels, especially *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice-Candy-Man* greatly resemble Naipaul's comic masterpiece *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). Like Naipaul's early novels, the works of Sidhwa are also a complex blend of autobiography, fiction and social commentary. The focus on a child's growing awareness of the world, evident in *Oliver Twist* and Pip's career in *Great Expectations* is also used by Bapsi in her presentation of Lenny in *Ice-Candy-Man* and the way she chronicles the adventures of a young Pakistani Parsi girl Feroza Ginwalla in America. The verbal abandon, caricature and witty remarks, a feature of the writings of Charles Dickens is also evident in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa. She adheres to the Dickensian method of a gripping story but is unlike Dickens in her limited authorial intervention. The sense of history which is so dominant in the novels of Dickens and Tolstoy also plays a prominent part in Bapsi Sidhwa's novels. After all, *Ice-Candy-Man* can be interpreted as the Pakistani perception of Partition. Her raucous humour, irreverance to established traditions and extrovert ribaldry reflect the influence of P.G. Wodehouse.

1.1.2 Use of Urdu Poetry

In *Ice-Candy-Man*, Bapsi Sidhwa uses a lot of Urdu poetry. The Urdu writers that have influenced Bapsi Sidhwa are Mirza Ghalib, Alama Iqbal (Pakistan's National Poet and a mystic), Faiz Ahmed Faiz (a Lenin prize winner) and women poets Zehra Nigar and Kishwar Naheed. She explains her use of Urdu poetry to Feroza Jussawalla in an interview. Sidhwa admits,

> Yes, my love of Urdu poetry overflows in this book (*Ice-Candy-Man*). I've made it a part of this book and woven it into the structure because I feel it gives a resonance to the book, a cultural resonance, something which is very eastern. Urdu has permeated the book in the form of poetry. (*Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World* p.215)

As part of her strategy to highlight the cultural differences as a post-colonial writer, Bapsi Sidhwa makes use of Urdu poetry and untranslated words like the political slogans "Jai Hind Jai Hind" and "Pakistan Zindabad!"(p.127) "lungi" or dress (p.127) "tamasha" or spectacle (p.136) and moulds the English language to suit her purpose.

The author also feels that the use of Urdu poetry and Urdu language gives an Indian ambience to her novel, *Ice-Candy-Man.* Such poetry also adds to the romantic flavour, especially in the scenes which depict the masseur wooing Lenny's attractive maid servant, known as ayah. Towards the end of the novel, when the ice-candy-man is besotted by ayah, he is unable to see her as she is in the recovered women's camp at Warris road. At such moments when love rather than communal hatred is the overwhelming passion, the author cleverly uses verses from Urdu poetry to depict the mood. The love-stricken ice-candy-man recites passages from Zauq, Faiz, Iqbal and Mirza Ghalib. For instance, standing at the gates of the compound in Warris road, he recites Zauq:

> Why did you make a home in my heart? Inhabit it. Both the house and I are desolate. Am I a thief that your watchmen stop me? Tell him, I know this man. He is my fate. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.276)

He is also heard humming Zauq's poems:

> Don't berate me, beloved. I'm god-intoxicated! I'll wrap myself about you; I'm mystically mad. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.277)

Urdu poetry adds to the pathos of the love affair and conveys the local ambience very effectively. I feel that by her selective use of Urdu poetry, Bapsi Sidhwa gives a lot of local colour, atmosphere and added meaning to her story. Creditably the use of the poetic verses do not appear jarring or just scholastic but the chosen verses enhance the appeal of the story. The English translation of these verses, used in the novel, are of very high quality.

1.1.3 Why she wrote in English

Like many people who are educated and brought up in the sub-continent, Bapsi Sidhwa is fluent in several languages- English, Urdu, Gujarati and Punjabi. Bapsi has however only written in English. Unlike some Indo-English novelists and critics she has no feelings of guilt or nagging doubts about writing in English. She uses English without inhibitions. Bapsi feels that she is an end product of the British Raj and so socio-historical circumstances make it inevitable that she should write in English. In an interview with David Montenergro, in March 1989, published in "*Points of Departure: International Writers on Writing and Politics*," Bapsi Sidhwa makes her position about writing in English very clear, she says:

> I find myself comfortable writing in this language (English). My written Urdu is not very good, though I speak it fluently. As for Gujarati, hardly anyone in Pakistan knows the language. In Britain of all places, people say, "Why don't you write in your own language?" And they bring heavy political overtones to bear on this. But I think well, the English don't have a monopoly on the language. It is a language of the world now. And it is a means of communication between various nationalities and the most immediate tool at hand. So I use it without any inhibitions or problems as far as I am concerned. (p.38)

She also has strong political reasons for writing in English. Sidhwa feels that writing in English increases the scope of her works of fiction. She feels that English is the language of the privileged, the elite and the powerful. Above all she feels it is important to write in English because it has emerged as the major world language.

Overall her writing style is influenced by Salman Rushdie and the technique of Indianisation of written English. Many of her sentences are punctuated with Gujarati and Urdu words, Parsi proverbs and Parsi-Gujarati cadences. She also feels that her writing style is influenced by her manner of speaking which she calls a "salad of languages."

Her reasons for writing in English are brutally candid and border on the political: She says:

> "Although the Raj has been banished, and the empire repossessed, the status of English remains more or less the same: it is still the language of the elite or the privileged and powerful... and the most important factor contributing to the phenomenon is the emergence of English as a world language." (Ibid)

1.1.4 How and why she became a novelist

Bapsi Sidhwa became a writer more by accident than design. She began to write at the suggestion of an Afghan woman she met on an aeroplane. Prior to that she was overawed by the term author and imagined him or her to be a superior human being. In an interview to David Montenergro she explained:

> I'm so fond of reading, and I used to think that a writer was some sort of a being who lives in another sphere. I never thought of the writer in human terms but almost as some disembodied power that automatically produced books. And suddenly by telling me that she (the Afghan woman) was a writer, she made me realise that writers are very flesh-and-blood persons. And that did make me want to write. (Ibid p.5)

This incident gave Bapsi Sidhwa the confidence to become a writer. She thought up her first novel after she heard the story of a young Punjabi girl who had run away from her tribal husband. The tribes live by a code of honour that reflects the harsh conditions of their environment . The girl, after surviving for almost two weeks in the lofty mountains was killed by her husband. This story haunted Bapsi Sidhwa as she felt it reflected the helpless condition of women in the sub-continent. It became an obsession with her and she decided to write it as a short story but it soon became a novel, *The Bride or The Pakistani Bride*, as it is titled in India. As Bapsi Sidhwa has herself often said, that it was not a tentative foray into writing, but a giddy and intoxicating nose-dive into a fabrication guided more by an intuition to write than by an exercise of the intellect. It was while she started writing that Bapsi Sidhwa discovered her ability to compose humorous passages. In an article, "Why do I write", Bapsi Sidhwa explained how she made time for her writing. She says:

> So I wrote when I was dummy at bridge, when my children were at school and my husband at work. Everything in my life took precedence over my

> writing. My husband was my sounding board. I read out what I'd written and his reaction, the surprised expression that often crossed his face, the way he raised an eyebrow and sometimes looked at me, fortified me. I could trust his judgement...he responded to the humo`rous passages with gratifying glee. (p.28)

Her first novel was written in long hand in a variety of notebooks and she typed the results, editing and retyping as the novel progressed. Nowadays of course she works on a computer. In an interview with Asif Rahim Khan published in *Weekend Post* of friday, 23 October 1991, she stressed that she was not a methodical writer or a disciplined writer like Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson or Nayantara Sehgal, who followed a fixed routine and wrote for so many hours per day. Her approach to writing is very similar to that of V.S.Naipaul, her favourite author, namely the need for inspiration and deep concentration when excited about a theme. In the interview with Asif Rahim Khan she explained how her approach is very individualistic:

> When I'm writing a novel, if I happen to write ten days a month, that's about the maximum. But when I do write, I write for almost 12 to 14 to 18 hours a day. You get into a roll, and sometimes you just don't want to stop, and then I can leave the novel for three to six months. It happened while I was writing *Ice-Candy-Man*. (3)

So we can see that by sheer chance and later, supported by her husband's enthusiasm, Bapsi Sidhwa discovered her talent and vocation as a novelist. Now that we know enough about the author, I would like to give a brief sketch about her four published novels.

1.2 THE WORKS OF BAPSI SIDHWA

Her controversial first novel *The Crow Eaters* (1978) is described by the author herself in the Preface as "The hilarious saga of a Parsi family", and also as a "labour of love about the few eccentricities in the community". Certain sections of the Parsi community considered it an unfair parody of Parsi life and rituals and there was even a mock bomb threat after its initial publication. The novel derives its humour from a blend of fantasy, scatology, physical and verbal incongruity and caricature. She writes in the tradition of Aristophanes, Fielding and the earlier novels of V.S.Naipaul, a mixture of farce and irony which arouses laughter but also reflects very serious themes. Her vision is comic and tolerant as she portrays the variety and vitality of life. There are also perceptive insights in presenting the marginalised Parsi milieu and Parsi characters as cultural hybrids.

Sidhwa dedicates *The Bride* (1983) to "the incredibly simple, deprived and courageous women of this (Pakistan) magnificent country". The core of the book is the heroine Zaitoon; not only is she a symbol of women fighting oppression in Pakistan but of the human spirit struggling to survive and maintain its integrity. It is a book about '*Khudi*' or will, a type of strength of nature or force within us.

Her third novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) belongs to the genre of the Partition novel popularised by Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgaonkar, Chaman Nahal and Attia Hosain. She uses the girl-child narrator Lenny and subtle political allegory to examine the inexorable logic of Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes. The use of rumour, dislocation of families and friends and the impact of violence on the human psyche are all humorously interwoven in a gripping and well-written narrative. Her implied message is similar to Bisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1973), that, "those who forget history are condemned to repeat it".

There are several other interpretations of the novel. The use of the precocious, eight year old, polio-infected Lenny is autobiographical. Bapsi Sidhwa was also affected by polio early in her life. The device of the child narrator enables Bapsi Sidhwa to treat a historical movement like Partition without morbidity, censure or pedantry. By the use of Lenny, the author maintains a masterful balance between laughter and despair. Through the character of the girl-child narrator the author Bapsi Sidhwa explores a female universe hemmed in by the restrictive and reductive forces of patriarchy and colonisation.

The author uses the "woman-as-victim' paradigm but the victimisation is the result of collective action due to the communal riots that followed Partition. The riots are shown as being orchestrated by males. The maid in the Parsi family at Lahore known as "ayah" suffers the impact of Partition the most. Her body is commodified by her husband, the ice-candy-man.

Sidhwa's fourth novel *An American Brat* (1994) moves its locale, for the most part to the United States of America. This novel reflects the trend of globalisation in the Indian diaspora. It reveals the experiences of Feroza Ginwalla, the rebellious daughter of Cyrus and Zareen Ginwalla, who moves from Gulberg, Lahore to Denver, Colorado, for higher studies. Sidhwa cleverly shows how attitudes change when a young and impressionable student moves from the third world to a first world nation like U.S.A. Feroza has to make a lot of cultural readjustments. Her room-mate Jo, teaches Feroza various Americanisms, so that she does not feel a misfit. For Feroza, the formation and maintenance of community takes on new dimensions. She outgrows the confines and limitations of her secluded, sheltered life in Lahore, develops an independent mind and chalks out her own career instead of being guided by solicitous advice from parents and elders.

The Parsi context to this novel is provided by the perennial problem of inter-faith marriage. This issue emerges when Feroza wants to marry David Press, an American Jew. The novelist through the guise of humour shows how elders exert pressures of conformity, tradition and emotional blackmail, to prevent the proposed marriage. There is an ironic exposure of fundamentalism characterized as parochialism, ignorance, conformity and insecurity at what is visibly different. Sidhwa criticizes fundamentalism amongst all communities in her novel. She criticises the "mullah mentality" that "girls must not play hockey or sing or dance," and the Parsi community's attempts to preserve cultural purity by forbidding all inter-faith marriages. She is equally critical of the narrow mindedness of American society in certain situations.

In the genre of Indo-Anglian fiction, Bharati Mukherjee has explored the theme of migration and re-adjustment in her short stories and her novel *Jasmine* (1989). Earlier Anita Desai had examined this theme in *Bye-Bye Black Bird* (1971) and Kamla Markandaya in *The Nowhere Man* (1972).

1.3 WHO ARE THE PARSIS?

The Parsis are an ethno-religious minority in India, living mostly on the west coast of the sub continent, especially in Mumbai. In Pakistan, most Parsis reside in Karachi and Lahore. The word Parsi means a native of "Fars" an ancient Persian province, now in southern Iran, the Greek word for this province was Persepolis. The Parsis left their homeland over twelve hundred years ago to save their religion, the teachings of Zoroaster, from being Islamized by the invading Islamic Arabians in the seventh century A.D. The Parsis are followers of prophet Zarathushtra. Their religion known as Zoroastrianism was founded around 2000 B.C. Historians dispute the date about

the origins of Zoroastrianism. Eminent historian and social chronicler, Eckehard Kulke in his meticulously researched book, *The Parsis in India: A Minority as Agent of Social Change* admits that there is controversy about the time of Zoroaster's actual historical appearance. According to Kulke, Western scholars, "date Zoroaster's activity mainly in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. (Jackson, Altheim, Zachner, Wesendonk, Henning, Hinz) or between the nineth and sixth centuries B.C. (Widengren). "(Kulke p.14). However Kulke says that Greek historiographers believe that Zoroaster lived and taught between 4,000 and 6,000 B.C.

Another renowned social historian, Piloo Nanavutty says two theories exist about the date of Zarathushtra (the Parsis pronounce the prophet as Zarathushtra, but in the Western world he is known as Zoroaster). In her book, *The Parsis* she says that the first tradition, "favoured by Western scholars is a late Sassanian tradition stating that Zarathushtra lived 238 years before Alexander. This tradition is based on the assumption that Kava Vishtaspa of the Gathas is the same as the Achemenian Vishtaspa, son of Cambyses I and father of Darius the Great. The genealogies of these two Vishtaspas, however are totally different. On linguistic grounds, also this theory is not tenable."(Nanavutty p.12).

Piloo Nanavutty feels that the tradition which asserts that Zarathushtra lived about 2,000 B.C. or earlier is the most probable theory as it is based on a linguistic comparison and evidence of a split between the Aryan tribes. According to Nanavutty, the linguistic comparison is between the Gathas and the Rig Veda. The split between the Aryan tribes which led to one branch migrating to India and the other remaining in Iran is considered to be due to the reforms initiated by Zarathushtra. Historians thus differ on the origins of this religion. However amongst the Parsis in India, the most commonly held view is that Zarathusthra lived about 2,000 B.C. Kulke believes this view is held, "because it helps the Parsis to that feeling of religious exclusivity necessary for the existence and survival of the community." (Kulke p.15).

The origins of this small community of around 100,000 go back to the Indo-European branch of the Aryans. They are said to be descendants of the Aryan tribes which migrated from the Pamirs of central Turkistan to west Asia, particularly Iran.

The religious texts of the Parsis are collectively known as the *Avesta.* The essence of the religion can be found in the five gathas or divine songs of Zarathushtra (there are many more gathas, but they are not traceable).The gathas are basically Zarathushtra the Prophet's dialogues with God, which reveal the ethical nature of his gospel. Other religious texts are the *Yasna*, a collection of seventy-two psalms which forms the chief liturgical work in the *Avesta* and the *Vendidad* which is a code of conduct, with laws on purity and behaviour in twenty-two chapters.

So the religion of the Parsis is Zoroastrianism. The word Parsi is an ethnic term or identity for this minority community. They should really be called Parsi-Zoroastrians. Present day Zoroastrians who have migrated to U.S.A or Canada or Britain can be distinguished in two groups. Those who have migrated from the Indian subcontinent are referred to as Parsi-Zoroastrians whereas others who have come from Iran are known as Iranian Zoroastrians.

The Parsi-Zoroastrians are famed for being a very adaptable minority community. Since they have settled in the Indian subcontinent they have adapted Gujarati as their main language. With the advent of the British and the spread of the British empire, the Parsis were the first Indian community to learn English. Nowadays Parsis learn how to speak, read and write in both Gujarati and English. Parsi families residing in different regions of India, also learn the regional language or Hindi. So most Parsi families in the Indian subcontinent speak at least three languages. This linguistic diversity is reflected in the works of Bapsi Sidhwa. A lot of her sentences in English are punctuated with Gujarati and Urdu words. For instance, in her novel *Ice-Candy-*

Man, Sidhwa shows how efforts are being made to stem the hardening communal attitudes in and around Lahore. She writes that gramophones and speakers mounted on tongas and lorries pour out the melody of Nur Jahan's popular film song.

> Mere bachpan ke sathi mujhe bhool na jana-
> Dekho, dekho hanse na zamana, hanse na zamana (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.159)

The English translation by Bapsi Sidhwa of the above lines is:

> Friends from our childhood, don't forget us-
> See that a changed world does not mock us.

So Bapsi Sidhwa writes in a new English, punctuated with words from Urdu and Gujarati like "Shahbash" (p.245) , "Khut putli" (p.222) , "Chachi" (p.208), "Paijee" (p.226) and "Churidar" (p.105).

The scriptures of religious texts of the Parsis are written in the ancient avestan languages or the pahlave script. There is a interesting history behind the development of the language spoken by the ancient Parsi Zoroastrians. This has been explained by the eminent Parsi scholar Jer D. Randeria in her book *The Parsi Mind: A Zoroastrian Assest to Culture*:

> From the speech of the ancients developed oral languages which have been called avestan by philologists, and the ancient gathic dialect of the avestan has been found to be similar to the sanskrit of the Rig Veda. In 530 B.C. a script was attempted which produced the cuneiform inscription on clay tablets in the avestan related ancient or old Persian language during the reign of the Achaemenian Darius the great. Old Persian became the language of the great Persian empire around 600 B.C while the Aramic script was used for writing. From it evolved the middle Persian, also called pahlave language around 300 B.C. The use of pahlave, mixed with Parthian words, continued until about 300 A.D. During the early Sassanian rule, it was replaced by Persian or Farsi as the official language. In the mid-Sassanian period about 530 A.D. an unknown priest invented the new avestan alphabet of 46 letters, based on pahlave characters,but having greater accuracy. By 1,000 A.D. the Iranian Zoroastrians began writing in new or modern Persian using Arabic script due to the Arabian invasion of Iran, but among themselves they preferred to speak in a local dialect called '*dari*' (p.9-10).

However all these languages are now extinct and are only used by priests for prayers.

1.3.1 Feeling of Group identity

In the 1997 census, conducted by the Government of India, the Parsis were only about 100,000, in number, 0.16 per cent of the total population of India. Yet their feeling of group identity and active participation in the social, cultural and economic life of both India and Pakistan is immense. Eminent jurist Nani Palkhiwala observes in his book *We the Nation: The Lost Decades* that "history affords no parallel to the role of Parsis in India. There is no record of any other community so infinitesimally small as Parsis, playing such a significant role in the life of a country so large". (p.317)

Are Palkhiwala's views just a case of euphoric back-patting? No. Let us examine the facts. As a community they are well-off and urbanized (about 94%). In industries such as shipping, aviation, banking, catering, canning and dairy products the Parsis have been pioneers in India. There have also been numerous legal luminaries. History names many notable Parsis such as Rustamji , Jivanji, Gorkhodu, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, K.F. Nariman, an ardent promoter of the Swadeshi movement, Dadabhai Naoroji, one of the founders of the Indian National Congress,

Sir Dinshaw Eduljee Wacha, President of the Indian National Congress at its 1901 session and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University and member of the Municipal Corporation of Bombay. Several of them played prominent roles in the freedom movement. Another significant feature is that despite being a miniscule minority, the Parsis have never asked for any "reservations" in the form of jobs or entrance to colleges in post-independent India. Along with such a progressive attitude and comparative prosperity, the Parsi community maintains a very strong sense of group identity and cohesiveness. Bapsi Sidhwa provides frequent examples of this group consciousness in her novel *Ice-Candy-Man*.

The best instance, I can think of, is the special meeting conducted by the Parsis in Lahore at their temple hall in Warris road to discuss the future prospects of the community when Independence and Partition were seen to be inevitable.

Now that we have a reasonable insight about the Parsi community let us try and understand some of the motivating factors, which make this small religious minority strive for a distinct identity. To understand their impetus even better, it is important to get some knowledge about the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism.

1.4 THE ZOROASTRIAN RELIGION

The religion founded by Zarathushtra or Zoroaster (the more commonly used Greek form of his name) is in its original form, monotheistic. In contrast to the innumerable gods and demons (daevas) of his time, Zoroaster proclaimed the sole, absolute, omnipotent, eternal god, called *Ahura Mazda* or "wise lord". *Ahura Mazda* is both the creator as well as the judge on the day of the last judgement. Zarathushtra was born in the city of Arak, in Azerbaijan. At the age of fifteen, Zarathushtra turned away from all worldly pleasures and devoted himself day and night to the worship of *Ahura Mazda*. When he was twenty years old, he bade farewell to his parents and went to meditate in a cave. Like Gautama the Buddha and like Mahavir, Zarathushtra also wanted to unravel the mystery of life. His queries all dealt with eternal problems like why was there death and suffering in the world and how did evil come into the world and why were some hungry and poor and others rich and well-fed.

According to customary tales Zarathushtra lived alone in a cave, high on mount Ushi-daren eating roots and berries and drinking goat's milk. On mount Ushi-daren which means "bestowing awareness", Zarathushtra received enlightenment and conversed with *Ahura Mazda* in a vision. At the age of thirty, Zarathushtra went back to the world of men and taught them the wisdom he had learnt. He and his first disciple Maidhyomaongha became wandering preachers. Many of the nearby tribes listened to him but rejected his teachings. After many trials and tribulations he first succeeded in the small kingdom of Bactria in Eastern Iran. His missionary labours continued for thirty years, after which he settled at Balkh the capital of Bactria, the Greek name for Afghanistan. For more detailed information on the life of Zarathushtra and his teachings you can read eminent Parsi historian Piloo Nanavutty's book *The Parsis* (1977). According to her, Zarathushtra was killed when he was seventy-seven years old. The prophet was stabbed in the back, whilst praying at the fire temple at Balkh, by Tur-bara-tur leader of the Turanians, a tribe hostile to the concept of monotheism.

1.4.1. The Zoroastrian Ethic

Zarathushtra preached the monotheistic religion of the one supreme god, *Ahura Mazda*. His message is a positive, life-affirming, active-principled one, which demands not so much belief as reason and action on the part of every individual. According to the prophet Zarathushtra, the whole universe is dominated by two primal forces, good and evil. The task of mankind is to choose between them.

Spenta mainyu the power of light and good are the good spirits opposed in this world by the evil spirits *angra mainyu*. The supreme god *Ahura Mazda* thus combines with *Spenta mainyu* to become the principle of good represented as *Ohrmazd*. The personified evil spirit is *Ahriman*. Life is seen as a ceaseless struggle between the forces of good and evil. There is no concept of earthly renunciation or asceticism. The moral demands on Parsi-Zoroastrians are "Hvarshta (good deeds), Hukhta (good words) and Humata (good thoughts)" (Eckehard Kulke, p.18) The conflict between good and evil will continue until evil is routed. After the destruction of evil, according to Zarathushtra's teachings there will be a general resurrection, a final judgement and then an endless era of universal peace. On earth human beings must make their own choice. A choice of the forces of good is a personal responsibility. In involves a life of active benevolence. The views on life after death are similar to those in Christianity. The good people will enter paradise, the rest will be ushered into purgatory or be plunged straight into hell.

Keki B. Shroff in a presentation made to Vision T.V. of Canada on 26 May 1995 showed how Zoroastrian ideas have played a vital role in the development of Western thought. He listed some theological concepts shared by Zoroastrianism with Judaism and Christianity. The similarities are as follows:-

Belief in one supreme and loving god.
The concept of heaven and hell and individual judgement.
The ultimate triumph of good over evil.
A strict moral and ethical code.
The messiah to come for the final restoration.
The concepts of resurrection, final judgement and everlasting life.
The Zoroastrian origin of words like Satan, Paradise, Pastor and Amen.

Now that we have understood some of the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism, let us briefly examine how it influences the behaviour of some of the Parsi characters in *Ice-Candy-Man*. The narrator Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi and her aunt Minnie travel all over Lahore providing cans of petrol to the beleaguered families of the minority Hindus and Sikhs to help them escape across the border. Explaining their secretive and seemingly suspicious outings, Lenny's mother says:-

> I wish I'd told you. We were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away. And also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like your ayah, to their families across the border. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.242)

The motivation behind such selfless and nobel actions by Lenny's mother is neither individual heroism nor political gain. Instead the motivating factors for such charitable acts can be linked to the Zoroastrian ethic of "good deeds". Towards the end of the novel, Lenny's godmother (one of her aunts) named Rodabai shows remarkable energy and capacity to handle crisis situations by rescuing the ayah after she was kidnapped and kept at a "kotha." Rodabai takes ayah to a rescued woman's camp and then arranges to send her to her relatives in Amritsar. Again the motivation of Rodabai's actions can be explained by the Zoroastrian credo of good thoughts and good deeds. So I would like to emphasize that the Zoroastrian ethic is a major motivating factor for many characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's novel.

1.5 THE MIGRATION TO INDIA

A historical perspective is essential to understand the dilemmas, identity crises and problems of the Parsi community in India which is aptly reflected in Parsi literature. The Parsis are the descendants of the Persian Zoroastrians who had sought refuge in

India in the eighth century A.D. when Persia now Iran was conquered by Arab invaders. After the collapse of the Persian empire at the battle of Nahawand in 642 A.D. the defeated Persians who practised the ancient monotheistic religion, Zoroastrianism, were converted to Islam by the conquering Arabs. Consequently many Zoroastrians fled from Iran and sought refuge in India.

Several history books dealing with the exodus of the Parsi Zoroastrians to India have stated that after fleeing from Madyan in Iran they first arrived at the port of Diu in the eighth century A.D. After their stay for about 19 years, they set sail towards the South and landed at the port of Sanjan in Gujarat around 785 A.D. Sanjan was then ruled by the liberal monarch, King Jadhav Rana.

The *dastur* (Priest) who was heading these refugees approached King Jadhav Rana, narrated their tales of woe and sought permission to settle down in Sanjan. At a public assembley in an open *Maidan*, the *dastur* gave details of the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism in sixteen sanskrit shlokas. It is believed that initially Jadhav Rana was hesitant about giving shelter to the refugees from Persia, as he was uncertain about the reaction of his own citizens. The King's first response was a sorrowful inability to accommodate the Zoroastrians on a permanent basis at Sanjan due to inadequancy of space.

At this crucial juncture, the *dastur* requested that an urn filled with milk to the brim be brought to the assembly. When the same appeared he took off his ruby studded gold ring and dropped it into the urn. Using this symbolic gesture, the *dastur* showed that just as the contents of the urn had not spilt over but become richer by the insertion of the precious ring, similarly the Parsi-Zoroastrians would bring further prosperity to that area if granted shelter. Moved by the reasoning of this pious priest, King Jadhav Rana asked the *dastur* to narrate their actual requirements. The *dastur* replied that they desired freedom of worship, freedom to bring up young children in their own traditions, and land for cultivation so that they became self-sufficient. Jadhav Rana agreed to these demands but imposed five pre-conditions for allowing the Zoroastrians to settle in Sanjan. The five stipulations were:-

To adopt the Gujarati language. (The Parsis have adopted this language faithfully, have forgotten their traditional dialects and in any modern day census reports indicate Gujarati as their mother tongue).

The women would wear the sari (this sartorial custom has also been faithfully followed and the Parsis in India have adopted sari as the dress of the community. Traditional Parsi women wear the 'Sidhi' sari in the Gujarati fashion, draped over the right shoulder, with one end tucked at the back and one end falling in the front).

Men should hand over their weapons.

Venerate the cow. (Due to this condition, traditional Parsis still do not eat beef, though there are no religious taboos against the eating of beef).

The marriage ceremonies shall be performed at night only. (This condition was imposed so that the local population is not attracted by such a ceremony and hence the danger of conversion is minimized. The Parsis in the subcontinent still follow this tradition and do not allow outsiders in their fire temples, which is a further guarantee that they will not attempt any conversions to their religion).

After accepting these stipulations, the fragile but learned *dastur* made one more symbolic gesture to assure the king of their loyalty and diligence. He stirred a spoonful of sugar in a brass bowl full of milk and said, "We shall try to be like this insignificant amount of sugar in the milk of your human kindness." Emotionally moved by such sincere commitment, King Jadhav Rana granted asylum to the

refugees in Sanjan. The *dastur* then appeared before the King and on behalf of the community pledged these words:

Hame Hindustan Rayr Bashim.
We shall be the friends of All India.
(*Dipanjali*: June-December 1996, 11).

The words of the *dastur* remained the basic credo or article of faith for Parsi Zoroastrians throughout their stay in India. It also reflects the characteristic spirit of adaptability of this minority community which enabled it to thrive in a country of such diverse cultures and religions.

1.5.1. Problems of Alienation

However, eminent Parsi literary critic Nilufer Bharucha views that the conditions and restrictions like adopting the local languages, costumes, customs and not inter-marrying with the local population and never proselytizing led to feelings of alienation within the community. She writes:

> These unequal conditions provided fertile breeding ground for feelings of ambivalence and alienation from the host country. This ambivalence and alienation became exacerbated during the colonial period, when the Parsis were among the first to embrace English language education and become the most Westernised Indian community. Most Parsis, thus felt bereft at the end of the empire and the resultant loss of the special/elite status they had enjoyed during the colonial period. Several migrated to the West in the 1950s and 60s. (Bharucha p.358)

However, as is evident in Parsi literature both the Parsis who sought opportunities in the West and those who stayed on in India have experienced identity crisis and confusion. In the West, the Parsis face the dilemma of being branded as just another community of sub-continental Asians, an identity they sought to escape. In India, as is reflected in the works of Rohinton Mistry, Dina Mehta, Firdaus Kanga, Boman Desai and Bapsi Sidhwa, this minority community has to cope with the hegemonic forces of the dominant community. The struggle to create their own space in the West as well as in India and the identity struggle of what it means to be a Parsi Zoroastrian and all the major problems, aspirations, hopes, ambitions and prejudices of the community are reflected in Parsi literature.

1.5.2 Declining Numbers

Madhavankutty Pillai in an investigative article in the *Asian Age* of 13 May 1997 reveals that prosperity, extreme individualism, urbanization, late marriages, low birth rate and antique laws about not accepting the children of Parsi women married outside the community are taking their toll on the Parsi community in India. Statistics show that the Parsis are the most urbanized community in India. 94% of the Parsi population is urbanized as compared to 16.4% of Hindus. Also the Parsi population in India has declined from about 1,14,890 in 1941 to about 75-80,000 in 1997. Though there are no definite figures available at present, a rough estimate is that in a year there are 1,000 deaths and 500 births.

Given these conditions and factors, the laws of statistics dictate the eventual annihilation of this community. If attitudes do not change, it seems unlikely that the Parsis will see another millenium change. Under these circumstances, as Rohinton Mistry has indicated in a recent interview, fiction such as his will record the history of the Parsis for the ages to come. Seen in this context, literature like the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa are a vital source of information about Parsi beliefs and practices.

1.6 TITLE OF THE TEXT

1.6.1 Political Connotations of the Title

When this novel was first published in 1988 in London, it appeared as *Ice-Candy-Man*. This was the title that Sidhwa had intended. However, in the 1991 American edition, the title was changed to *Cracking India*, because the publishers thought, Americans would misunderstand "ice-candy" and confuse it with drugs. The new title for the American edition is more explicit and clearly indicates that it is a novel of partition, which prioritises India. However the original title had significant symbolic connotations. First of all we must remember the centrality of the ice-candy-man's role to the love theme and political themes of this novel. Sidhwa deliberately avoided naming the central character. He is called ice-candy-man because this name has certain specific political connotations.

Sidhwa has always maintained that this character represents what she calls or considers the "icy" unstable quality of politicians who determine the fate of their subjects. At one point in the novel, Lenny the adult narrator talks about the "Ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi's non-violent exterior" (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.88). Such men are icy, according to Sidhwa because they are remote and indifferent to the human loss they cause by their political acts. She also feels that political leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose and the English Viceroy Lord Louis Mountbatten were cold as ice to the sufferings caused by Partition. Such an interpretation is again part of Sidhwa's historical vision. She has always believed that politicians stir up trouble and it is the ordinary person, a woman like godmother, who "battles wrongs."

So the title *Ice-Candy-Man* is a metaphor for those who wield power and it provides an inventive and indirect way to explore the role politicians played in the holocaust and bloody birth of Pakistan and the new India. Sidhwa feels that politicians like the ice-candy-man were just role playing. She thereby implies that politicians are not consistent and their public image keeps shifting. It is also suggested that the motives of politicians appear noble but are often selfish. Like the scheming politicians, the ice-candy-man also frequently changes roles. When the sales of ice-candy decline in cold weather he changes his profession. He becomes a birdman who takes pride in deceiving his customers. When due to communal tension, bigotry is on the increase, the ice-candy-man become "allah's telephone" (p.107), posing as a holy man with a direct line to the almighty and apologizing to his clients that allah "has been busy of late... you know; all this Indian independence business." (p.107). So towards the end of the novel, the ice-candy-man becomes a holy (actually unholy!) pretender, which the author implies is the role of many politicians. Ultimately the ice-candy-man takes up the despicable profession of pimping. So overall it is seen that the ice-candy-man uses his glib tongue and power of rhetoric to be successful in many roles. The author suggests that politicians especially during the time of Partition were indulging in mere double-speak.

Overall, the novel is far too subtle to state a direct political view. However, it does not idolize the Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru and vilify Jinnah as often happens in post-partition fiction and histories. For political reasons, at times, Sidhwa provides an alternate view of Jinnah and appears to be praising him. However Sidhwa's overall belief is that the maneuvering of those in power has no more substance or permanence than melting ice-candy. So ironically the seller of such an ephemeral product, the man who shifts from one role to another turns into the unlikely symbol of those who were making history or at least thought they were doing so. The title, as I have tried to explain is not just chosen at random but has several interesting political connotations which enhance the subtle meanings of this text.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

It must be realized that Bapsi Sidhwa drifted from being a typical socialite and wife of a successful businessman in Lahore to becoming an internationally acclaimed novelist. She became a novelist by chance and accidentally discovered that she possessed the gift of telling stories in a gripping and humorous manner. This is also probably due to the influence of her favourite authors - Dickens, Tolstoy, V.S. Naipaul and P.G. Wodehouse. Her narrative style is racy with liberal use of Urdu and Gujarati words and idioms. The novel for detailed study, *Ice-Candy-Man* is quite autobiographical, as the girl-child narrator Lenny suffers from polio, which afflicted Sidhwa at a young age. In her novel, the Parsi-Zoroastrian background is dominant. Hence in this section, we have identified features of this minority, and have given a comprehensive view of their religion and group identity. The Parsi diaspora, the migration to undivided India is shown in greater details because it has an impact on how certain characters behave in this novel. To give you a better understanding of this humorous but unique novel, I have also given a brief presentation of two of the most contentious topics amongst contemporary Parsis, their alienation from the majority community and their declining numbers. Finally the political connotations of the title have been examined.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Gathas:	Sacred texts of the Parsis
Inexorable:	Relentless or unyielding or remorseless
Millenium:	A period of a thousand years
Minority discourse:	A type of writing with emphasis on the views, attitudes and feelings of a small group of people who differ from others in certain characteristics.
Paradigm:	An example or model used as a standard for the whole group of an archetype. Also the framework of theories and concepts forming the background of a scientific approach.
Patriarchy:	A society or social organisation marked by the supremacy of the father or a male figure. Male dominated society in which male members act as leaders.
Proselytising:	To convert from one religion or belief to another
Resurrection:	A state of revival.
Scatology:	Obscenity or obsessive interest in obscenity in relation to excrement
Shlokas:	Verse forms, used in ancient Indian Literature

1.9 QUESTIONS

Q1. How and why did Bapsi Sidhwa become a novelist? Mention the authors who influenced her style of writing. Why did she prefer to write in English?

Q2. Outline the origins of the Parsi community, and give an account of the Zoroastrian ethics.

Q3. Why did the Parsis immigrate to India? How did they gain permission to settle in Gujarat?

Q4. Discuss the various political connotations of the title, *Ice-Candy-Man.*

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UNIT 2 THE NARRATIVE VOICE IN *ICE-CANDY MAN*

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 The Narrative Voice and its ambivalence
2.3 Lenny's Narrative
2.4 The Function of Narrator's several Identifications viz. the society
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Glossary
2.7 Questions
2.8 Bibliography
2.9 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to study the unique narrative voice of *Ice-Candy-Man*. The author's reasons for employing a girl-child as the narrator of her novel set in the politically volatile period of India's Partition in 1947 will also be explored. We shall see how Lenny's dual aspects as the narrator and the chief character of *Ice-Candy-Man* modify a novel on the theme of communal antagonism into an intensely complex and personal statement.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Having read the novel the readers must have noticed that it is, above all else, the narration by an intensely self-reflexive and observant character. This character, an eight year old polio afflicted child, Lenny, narrates the incidents, introduces the novel's characters and talks aloud as it were, her ruminations on all the subjects included in her narration. Therefore, the narrative of *Ice-Candy-Man* becomes a character's autobiography. The text juxtaposes the child's psyche with the goings on of the adult world, while for this child the world around her itself is a text.

The dividing line between a child as the narrator and a writer speaking through a child's consciousness is deftly camouflaged by the use of first person narration in the present tense. This ambivalence in the narrative voice is revealed only on account of Lenny's acute self-awareness of her implication in the rather precious response she makes to the world around her.

So we have to address several issues when we discuss the narrative voice of this novel. Firstly, why is an ambivalent narrative voice employed by Sidhwa for this story? Secondly, why does she use a child's perspective to contextualise the events of a political battle in India's history? Lastly, why is this child a character marginalized from several locations of her social identity i.e what purpose is served by Lenny's being a handicapped Parsi girl child narrator?

The possible answers to these questions would provide valuable insights into the political sympathies of the novel itself.

2.2 THE NARRATIVE VOICE AND ITS AMBIVALENCE

The narrative opens with the Urdu poet Iqbal's 'Complaint to God':

> Shall I hear the lament of the nightingale, submissively lending my ear?
> Am I the rose to suffer its cry in silence year after year?
> The fire of verse gives me courage and bids me no more to be faint.
> With dust in my mouth, I am abject: to God I make my complaint...(1)

It is often through 'verse' or art that the stifled sentiments of the victimised minorities in any culture are given a voice. For her novel Bapsi Sidhwa chooses the eight year old Lenny as the narrator to voice the anxiety of the underprivileged during India's Partition. Lenny in the novel is not just marginalised as a child but also as a girl, as a Parsi and as a physically deficient member of her society. This makes her's a very effective and resonant narrative voice both in the genre of Partition novels and in the *bildungsroman* writings.

Spoken from the margins of the mainstream discourses of patriarchy, nationality, religion and aesthetics, Lenny's comments reverberate with questioning and critique even at their most naïve: 'He [Gandhi] is a man who loves women. And lame children. And the untouchable sweeper – so he will love the untouchable sweeper's constipated girl-child best' (87).

I would also like the students to notice here how the narrator is distancing herself from the "untouchable sweeper's constipated girl-child" in spite of the ironic similarity in their multiple marginalized status. Lenny is thus avoiding, even resenting, any gush of Gandhi—like pathos as a desired response to her narrative. Instead, the narrative carries the readers along a lighthearted current of irony and wayside observation into some of the most heart-rending areas of human experience.

Like most eight year olds, our child narrator is an untiring explorer. Forever asking questions, forever watching, listening – her curiosity to fathom the seen and the unseen dimensions of life around her is typical of growing children. And her intuition is stronger than most. The result is a collage – like narrative. Events, people and ruminations are unpredictably juxtaposed in it and hence, the various concerns the author has in mind are presented in an uncontrived manner.

The child-narrator is shown coming across post-colonial politics, gender divisions, victimisation and dilemmas of the minority communities, child-abuse et al, and she tells her story as such. In her interview for *The Hindustan Times* in 1998, Bapsi Sidhwa emphasized the importance of a writer's location when he/she is writing. 'I wanted to be in Pakistan/India. There are little details one absorbs, a sense of place, a resonance of being there, memory does not give you the feel' she explains. Perhaps, the same can be said about Sidhwa's use of a child as the story-teller. Narrating as a child (its autobiographical account) makes childhood the location of experience. It gives the feel that writing 'about' childnood as an adult might miss – "a resonance of being there". So Lenny's experience and her expression of it strikes a special chord with the readers. Innocently wide-eyed sometimes, and at other times staggeringly precocious, Lenny's perspective defamiliarizes the common places of adult experience 'What is God' she wonders (94) and "What is a *fallen* woman?" she asks her Godmother (215).

However, *Ice-Candy-Man* is not a child's almanac only. The author, infact, is keeping a close watch over this mini-narrator. In the introduction we said that there is a deftly camouflaged dividing line between the child-narrator and the writer

speaking through a child's consciousness. Let us look at this passage to notice the difference:

> Switching the bulletin immediately mother recounts some observations of mine as if I've spent the entire morning mouthing extraordinarily brilliant, saccharinely sweet and fetching remarks....
>
> And when mother pauses, on cue, I repeat any remarks I'm supposed to have made: and ham up the performance....
>
> And as the years advance, my sense of inadequacy and unworth advances. I have to think faster – on my toes as it were... offering lengthier and lengthier chatter to fill up the infernal time of Father's mute meals. Is that when I learn to tell tales? (79-80)

The omniscience and insight of passages such as this one clearly transcends the childhood narrative framework but remains connected to it through the uninterrupted use of present tense prose in the first person. Instead of remaining a child's autobiographical account, the narrative becomes the autobiographical account of a prospective teller of tales. In "Why do I write?" Sidhwa observes –

> ... a part of me could observe my mind; admire its keenness, its subtlety with words, its ability to express not only what I wanted to say, but to extend my meaning (*The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*, 29).

Clearly, what we have in our hands is a fictionalized autobiography of the author who makes no attempt to hide this fact – allowing the author and the narrator to speak simultaneously in the text. Like Lenny, Sidhwa herself had witnessed Lahore burning in 1947. Afflicted with polio she could not get regular schooling but was taught by an Anglo-Indian tutoress at home. From Unit 1 we can easily trace the foliation between Sidhwa and Lenny. What is relevant to our discussion in this unit, however, is the craftsmanship with which the author and the narrator are interwoven in the narrative, and how, it enriches the novel both with a child's insight and an adult's hindsight.

Fusion of the two narrative voices (leaving apart Ranna's story); the collapsing of the time zones into a simple present; and the *collage format* to narrate the events are some of the post-modern strategies of narration. They give an immense flexibility to the writer – a lot of discursive space to perspectivise a given event, character or idea in a myriad ways. At the same time, *Ice-Candy-Man* sticks to the realistic mode of writing by using a child as its apparent narrator.

Hence we have seen that the simplistic reading of the novel as a child's narrative only will be inadequate. The narrative is characterized by an ambivalence which enriches its scope of significance. Now let us take an overview of the content of this narrative.

2.3 LENNY'S NARRATIVE

Lenny belongs to a reasonably well off Parsi family in Lahore (then a part of undivided India). Incapble of much physical movement on her own, she is perambulated around the city by her Hindu ayah. At the onset of the story, the two things which absorb her attention and whet her curiosity the most, are human relationships, and the paraphernalia of public life surrounding her microcosmic private world: the fair-skinned British regiments, the erratic Indian processions, the larger than-life figure of Queen Victoria, the grand reputations of Nehru, Gandhi and

Jinnah. As a result her narrative absorbs the personal and the political lives throbbing about her.

While polio prevents her from getting conventionally educated at a school, she is further set apart from average children by her inability to tell children's lies and get away with them. Tempered neither by cushioning cliches (usually taught at school) nor by complacent self-deception (which the harmless lies inevitably nurture) Lenny grows up taking in the particulars of her environment in their bare and harsh reality.

She observes the various sides of love and enmity among people both at the level of her own family and community, and at the level of those social groups with whom her own set would not, as a rule, intermix. She has access to this 'other' group through her sexually attractive ayah and the retinue of admires who gravitate towards her, irrespective of their religion, profession or political affiliation. The ayah, the Ice-candy-man, Imam Din, Sher Singh, the Masseur et al are some of the significant characters of the novel who emerge out of this group.

As the political climate of Lahore gets charged with all the talk of dividing the country along Hindu and Muslim communal territories, the people, both within and outside her family, begin to act and speak like altered beings. Her mother turns from a coy and charming wife to a busy car driver, the ayah from a flirting manipulator of the opposite sex to a woman who wishes to marry and settle down, the admirers of ayah from being mere 'men' to becoming a Muslim, a Hindu or a Sikh. Amidst all this frenzy of changing self-definitions and roles, the man who conspicuously stands out – almost emblematic of all this change – is the Ice-candy-man. Lusting for the ayah with a fervid determination and possessiveness, he is the one who keeps changing his professions sniffing change in the political climate, his whim, or the prospects of profit. Though he is compulsive in his attractive virtuosity Lenny begins to suspect him as one suspects the art of a salamander. But the actual betrayal comes when he cons Lenny into telling him the ayah's hiding place. He leaves Lenny shocked at the terrible consequences truth telling can bring, and awakens her to the possibility of misplaced trust in the people.

Guided by lust and communal antagonism the Ice-candy-man violates the object of his desire. (Ayah is a Hindu and he a Muslim). Though at the close of Lenny's narrative, the kidnapped ayah is found out and released from the grip of prostitution and forced marriage to the Ice-candy-man, it is a sad story nonetheless.

Beyond the ambit of Lenny's narrative lies a world that is transformed beyond recognition or regret. It is important to note that while the child narrator lets go of the thread of her tale at the point where ayah goes away to her family and the Ice-candy-man disappears across the Wagah border behind her, she makes the audience realise that hereafter the narrative must perforce cease to be a child's. The jolt to Lenny's perceptions suggests a violence and violation as mutilating as any dealt out to the myriad victims in the novel.

> The innocence that my parents' vigilance, the servants' care and Godmother's love sheltered in me, that neither cousin's carnal cravings, nor the stories of the violence of the mobs, could quite destroy, was laid waste that evening by the emotional storm that raged round me. The confrontation between Ice-candy-man and Godmother opened my eyes to the wisdom of righteous indignation over compassion. To the demands of gratification – and the unscrupulous nature of desire.
>
> To the pitiless face of love (252).

Like her childhood friend Ranna, Lenny also ceases to be an innocent child when the experiences of adult life burst into her life in this unexpected manner. Ranna, who is playful, confident and secure in his ample family, loses it all during the Akali's attack on the Muslim village of Pir Pindo. His mother and sister are raped, his father's head

lopped off before his eyes, his village burnt and people killed or uprooted from their ancestral land. When Lenny meets him later – and hears the story of his survival she tries to understand the rules of the game.

> It surprises me how easily Ranna has accepted his loss; and adjusted to his new environment. So ... one gets used to anything .... If one must. (211)

And so, Lenny must get used to the loss of her childhood serenity and her unsuspecting nature. A child of eight she is required to encounter the world with the implicit aim to define her position within it. To make this choice she takes her cue from other people with whom she identifies or else differs. Picking up information, toying with it with logic and intuition, making connections and confirming them, Lenny's narrative charts her development from innocence to experience.

She recognizes that she is a 'social animal' – a Parsi colonized, physically disabled girl child! These are her several identifications through which the author's political sympathies are delineated. So let us study their effect on the novel in detail.

2.4 THE FUNCTION OF THE NARRATOR'S MULTIPLE IDENTIFICATIONS VIZ. THE SOCIETY

As the Afghan, Sharbat Khan in the novel, bitterly states, "Children are the Devil... They only know the truth" (192) Lenny's undeviating truth-telling characterises the narration and makes its political outlook a sincere one.

While the child's voice is untainted by untruth or prejudices of religion, nationality or gender, and so appears fresh and objective, it gradually gets implicated in the world around her which begins to make impressions upon Lenny's psyche. The narrative of *Ice-Candy-Man* features this change in Lenny with sensitivity and skill. In her pliable, child's mind some amazingly tenacious identifications are waiting to cast their mark. And before the character knows it, her story becomes the narrative about the marginalized social sections. She awakens to her identity as a religious minority, the 'second sex' and aesthetically lacking child. However, instead of speechifying against these traditional marginalizations, the political wrongs of life are corrected by the author in literature in Lenny's character.

Like most children, Lenny is shown imitating the adults and hence, holding a mirror to their behavior. She wants to listen to the gossip between the ayah and her friends, and withold or dispense sexual favours from her cousin the way Ayah does with her admirers. Having witnessed the vicious circle of communal crossfire and the victimisation of the innocent in this sordid bargain, she vents her inexplicable frustration upon her toys:

> I pick up a big, bloated celluloid doll. I turn it upside down and pull its legs apart...
> I hold one leg out to Adi. 'Here', I say, pull it.'
> 'Why?' asks Adi looking confused.
> 'Pull, damn it!' I scream, so close to hysteria that Adi blanches and hastily grabs the proffered leg... Adi and I pull the doll's legs, stretching it in a fierce tug of war, until making a wrenching sound it suddenly splits... I examine the doll's spilled insides and, holding them in my hands, collapse on the bed sobbing...
> 'Why were you so cruel if you couldn't stand it?' he asks at last, infuriated by the pointless brutality
>
> (138-39).

The child's destruction of her doll has an allegorical significance. It is an allegory on the nature of violence. A young girl who is powerless to stem the tide of surging violence in Lahore and Amritsar, releases herself from it's terror only by inflicting violence upon a symbolic helpless object – the lifeless doll. Her act mimes the instinct that made several men, including Sher Singh and the Ice-candy-man, victimise the women and children of their rival communities during Partition. Thus, the narrative carefully juxtaposes vignettes from adults' politics and children's lives in the same milieu, creating a political satire.

Moreover, the narrator's identity as a child helps Sidhwa to pull the grown-ups' vocabulary and ideologies askew in the act of trying to understand them. Lenny asks,

> There is much disturbing talk. India is going to be broken. Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's then? (92)

So the flawed reasoning behind the socio-political norms gets exposed and questioned without overt argument. At the same time, children's consciousness is recognised as an important area of experience, instead of marginalizing it as unimportant or limited.

Lenny is also important as a 'girl' child. In the literature on Partition in English, she is perhaps the only prominent girl-child narrator, beside Attia Hosain's 'Laila' in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. As a girl she addresses the issues of children's forced marriages to old and morally degenerate men and the gender bias to which girl children are subjected even by their own families. Lenny's inclusion of the untouchable servant-child Papoo's story in her narrative is the case in point. Papoo who is about two years older than Lenny is made to do all the menial chores by Muccho, her mother. She is constantly beaten up without any clear motive and then one day married off to the middle aged Tota Ram in her drugged state. While the "Christian marriage litany in Punjabi" (189) joins "the crumpled heap of scarlet and gold clothes" (186) in holy union with the insolent man, Lenny, though herself a child, is shocked as she imagines "the grotesque possibilities awaiting Papoo" (187).

Lenny's account also introduces Ranna's two child sisters who, unlike Papoo, revel in role playing as women. Thus, the narrative of *Ice-Candy-Man* implicitly questions the indifferent featuring in novels of girls as premature adults whose childhood is but a prepartion of their future as domestic wives. Jasbir Jain in her article *in The Girl in 20th Century Indian Literature* asks

> "Where does one find the girl-child in the pages of fiction?... To every Jane Eyre, there are many David Copperfields, Tom Browns and Huckleberry Finns" (p.78)

She observes that even in those texts where girl children feature, they are usually cast in the readymade roles of wives and mothers. "Women it seems are never young. They step straight into adulthood and are expected to be responsible and wise" (Ibid, p.79). Aware of such devaluation of girl children's experience in fiction, Sidhwa in her work has acknowledged the complexity of their lived experience. Above all, Lenny's privileged positioning as the narrator achieves this end commendably.

Unlike most boy's narratives, Lenny's is not an adventure story. Her unlikely access to butcher houses, cheap restaurants, Imam Din's village or the prostitutes' quarters in 'Hira Mandi' are not sensational devices in the novel but occasions to reassess the stereo-type in her social circuit. Huckleberry Finn, (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain, 1966) after all his escapades with his Negro slave ultimately sees the black man reaffirming a dubious stereotype in accepting the white man's superiority

unquestioningly. In contrast to Huck leberry Finn, Lenny's involvement with characters who are considered socially inferior to her has a deeper basis, and as such, challenges the stereotypes.

The stereotype of feminine beauty is also challenged in this narrative. Sidhwa had experienced that the lives of girl children become all the more harsh if they do not conform to the standards of beauty in society. The 'plain Jane' syndrome is believed to mar any prospects that a girl might hope for in the man's world. So our narrator is portrayed, in her own words, thus – "I am, skinny, wizened, sallow, wiggly-haired, ugly"(22). Besides, she is also lame. There is an occasional hint of the anxiety that she might not get a husband easily. Slavesister unwittingly remarks – "It'd be hard enough finding someone for you as it is "to which Lenny quickly responds in defence, "Mummy says: my husband will search the world with a candle to find me!"(216)

It is significant that though Lenny feels sorry for her state at some isolated moments, her spirit is not smothered by her lack of feminine attributes of health or beauty. While her cousin fondly and sincerely assures her that he finds her limp attractive, and offers to marry her Lenny is far from overwhelmed with gratitude – "Let's see how I feel about marrying you when I grow up."(218)! Her spirit in invincible.

As the curtin rises to her adolescence Lenny begins to recognise her sexuality and discovers a new dimension of her personality. It empowers her with a confidence and dignity before which the standards of physical beauty pale in significance.

> As the mounds beneath my nipples grow, my confidence grows.....What with my limp and my burgeoning breasts – and the projected girth and wiggle of my future bottom – I feel assured that I will be quite attractive when I'm grown up (220).

There is something refreshing in Lenny's response to her various identifications, notwithstanding their traditionally marginalized status. Her treatment, in the narration of her Parsi identity is perhaps the most witty and readable rendition of the voice of the minorities. However, it will be covered in detail in Unit 4.

By filtering the saga of the subcontinent through a unique child's consciousness, the narrative of *Ice-Candy-Man* contrives to highlight what in history has remained marginalized.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

The insights offered by the analysis of the narrative voice in this novel makes us realise that it is not unidimensional, but ambivalent.

Moreover this narrative voice has an age, a gender and some political viewpoint to offer. However, it is not smug or complacent in its approach, but is acutely self-reflexive. This kind of narration invites the readers to respond to multiple perspectives, and opens the text up for discussion on the several issues Lenny's autobiographical account touches upon.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Almanac: A written record with extensive details of the proceedings during a period. A diary.

Communal: Pertaining to a group that has shared interests, usually of a religious nature. Belonging to a community.

Marginalized: To be neglected, or exploited. The term has acquired theoretical overtones as a result of the growth of modern literary theories from feminism and post-colonialism to post structuralism. It is used to denote those identities that have suffered as under-privileged communities within the structures of patriarchy, colonialism, class system and racial prejudices.

Patriarchy: A social system in which individuals, biologically male, control the organisation. Power and control are completely posited with the men, whereas the women are expected to play a subordinate role in obeisance to the laws made by men. Man is not only the head of his family, but occupies the privileged position in workplace, society and religious premises.
Several sterotypes regarding the biological, psychological and intellectual nature of the two sexes have come into circulation as a result of patriarchy which is endorsed in most civilisations all over the world.

Precocity: A state of being ahead of one's age.

Satire: Use of ridicule, irony or sarcasm to criticise any objectionable premise.

Narrator: The person who narrates a story.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. How does the device of a child-narrator modify the reading of *Ice-Candy-Man* as a Partition novel?
2. Briefly discuss the ambivalence of the Narrative voice and the purpose it serves.
3. *Ice-Candy-Man* is an autobiographical fiction. Discuss with special reference to Bapsi Sidhwa's status as a Parsi woman from the third world and Lenny's multiple identifications as a handicapped, Parsi girl-child narrator.

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2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 FEMINIST INSCRIPTIONS IN *ICE-CANDY-MAN*

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Feminism
3.3 Feminist inscriptions in the text
  3.3.1 Lenny
  3.3.2 Lenny's mother
  3.3.3 Ayah
  3.3.4 Godmother and Slave Sister
3.4 Let Us Sum Up
3.5 Glossary
3.6 Questions
3.7 Bibliography
3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit provides a summary of some of the premises of feminist literary practice in order to enable the students to analyse *Ice-Candy-Man* with reference to feminism. The women characters are studied extensively so that their separate as well as common experiences can be placed in the context of some of the chief issues addressed by women's studies. These issues range from sexual exploitation of women within and outside their homes, to the stereotypes attributed to them : Virgin, Mother, Angel in the House, Superwomen, Earth Mother. It is not our aim to impose feminism as an ideology upon the text, but to study the text for its ideological leanings with respect to gender related issues.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

What is it that invites a feminist critique of a particular text, should be our first question. The next question should be : what do we mean by the term "feminist"? Only then can we do justice to the text in its analysis viz. a specific political approach, which in this unit is feminist.

Since gender as a defining category of difference between the human species is a pan-global phenomenon, the response to this difference in any context, potentially invites a feminist study. But how does a feminist study of representation of sexual difference differ from any objective assessment? What are the special premises of feminism? How is it relevant in a particular context? These are some of the questions I will try to address by explaining what we mean by feminism. Thereafter I will highlight the various aspects of *Ice-Candy- Man* that might benefit from a feminist approach. Lastly we shall explore the poetics of the text *Ice-Candy- Man* with reference to its treatment of gender differences

3.2 FEMINISM

The term broadly refers to the new woman's movement which emerged in the 1960s. The experiences of women and the status of women in the sexual heirarchy were the

concerns of this movement, which implicitly as well as explicitly questioned the positioning of women as "inferior" or "defective" (Aristotle), "passive" and "subordinate" in comparison to men. Feminists challenged these assumptions of woman's secondary status to the primary status of man and the presumptuousness of compartmentalising her essence as a home maker, a mother, a stationary presence in stark contrast to the stereotypes of masculinity, male strength, wanderlust and aggression. The feminists identify the origins of this "sexist" bias in patriarchy. According to the epochal study of Kate Millett, patriarchy constitutes 'perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power' (Sexual Politics, 1969 : p. 25). Since in personal as well as social relationships between man and women power is ascribed to the former, and powerlessness is imposed upon the latter, Millett sees "sexual politics" at work behind the accepted definitions of man and woman, and their roles.

Toril Moi a later feminist critic explains:

> In keeping with Millett's approach, feminists have politicised existing critical methods, and it is on this basis that feminist criticism has become a new branch of literary studies. (Feminist Literary Criticism... p.205)

Since it resents all essentialisations, as being a patriarchal ploy for preserving an exploitative order, feminism does not intend to provide alternate definitions of woman/man, masculinity/femininty, male/female. In other words, today's feminism is anti-partiarchy but not anti-man just as it is pro-woman without seeking to replace patriarchy with matriarchy.

As a critical approach its purpose is to scratch the surface of the so-called 'neutral and 'objective' texts and reveal that these are infact, appropriated by patriarchy to preserve its voice against any possible resistance.

Feminist critics have been unearthing the women writers whose expression has remained largely marginalized in the literary canons all over the world. Women's writings: diaries, poetry, are now studied by the feminist critic for specific consciousness-raising projects. However, they are carefully studied by feminists not to present all women writers as "feminist". While writings by women and about women - like the novel and the author under this discussion – are of interest to the feminist critic, they might or might not be feminist in themselves. As Toril Moi explains, they might not be per se emancipatory reading for women (*"Feminist Literary Criticism"*..p.230). Mills and Boon popular literature is a case in point. Rosalind Coward in 'Are Women's Novels Feminist novels?' argues, 'The Mills and Boon romantic novels are written by, read by, marketed for, and are all about women. Yet nothing could be further from the aims of feminism than these fantasies based on sexual, racial, and class submission which so frequently characterizes these novels (Coward 1980, p.230). Instead, if a text dramatizes the sexist stereotypes with the intention of subjecting then to critical scrutiny, only then does it have a feminist commitment.

3.3 FEMINIST INSCRIPTIONS IN *ICE-CANDY- MAN*

The prominent characters in *Ice-Candy-Man* are mostly women, and at the centre of them is Lenny - a girl child who is also the narrator. Though the paradigm of 'woman-as-victim' features in almost all writings on the theme of Partition (see Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Manohar Malganokar's *A Bend in the Ganges*) *Ice-Candy-Man* stands apart from the rest in its dramatization of this paradigm. The extensive featuring of women's shared experiences of victimization in the communal riots is here complimented by a presentation of their oppression and the strategies to overcome the oppression even at

a personal level inside their homes, and in their relationships with husbands and lovers. In this novel, the fundamental schism between man and woman cannot be hidden even from the eyes of the eight years old Lenny. If, as discussed in the previous unit about the child-narrator, we acknowledge that Lenny's narrative is the most important clue to the political commitment of the novel itself, then it follows that the use of her consciousness as the dialectical site of contest between different ideologies (specifically gender related) makes the text polyvalent: one in which I argue, the feminist inscriptions are markedly visible.

Its protagonist's world-view is largely determined by her limited range of movement around her house.

> My world is compressed. Warris Road, lined with rain gutters, lies between Queens Road and Jail Road....
>
> Rounding the right–hand corner of Warris Road and continuing on Jail Road is the hushed Salvation Army Road....
>
> Jail Road also harbours my energetic electric–aunt and her adenoidal son....
>
> Opposite it....Is the one-and-a-half room abode of my godmother... This is my haven. My refuge from the perplexing unrealities of my home on Warris Road.
>
> A few furlongs away Jail Road vanishes into the dense bazaars of Mozang Chungi. At the other end a distant canal cuts the road at the periphery of my world (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.1,2).

The extent to which politics determine the goings-on within this rather homely area of Lenny's experience vividly comes across in Lenny's narration. Unlike mainstream writing, which is hero-oriented and represents women and home in its sentimental paraphernalia, *Ice-Candy-Man* foregrounds the women's consciousness as they are affected by the political battles mentioned above. The novel highlights their domestic roles, their individual characteristics, their shared experiences of sexual exploitation, their survival and their sexuality against the backdrop of Partition. And this experienced realm deeply affects Lenny's psyche. We can argue that Sidhwa has recreated a universe where women appear as biological beings 'female' as compared to the stereotype 'feminine'. This is not to say that by depicting so many women, the text or Lenny's narrative perse becomes 'feminist'; or even that all or some of its characters are feminist. What we are suggesting is that a woman-centred writing such as this in the genre of the Partition novel - has to be placed alongside the new awareness regarding the 'second sex' as Simone de Beauvoir identified women in the patrilineal hierarchy. Let us now look at the several characters in the novel to facilitate our study. Each of these characters brings out a trope of the relationship between the two sexes in society.

3.3.1 Lenny

Women tend to be treated as casualties and such is their (non) representation in the mainstream literature, that a girl-child (we would agree) has even fewer chances as a character and much less as a narrator. As discussed in the previous unit - a girl-child is usually 'an invisible silent presence' (Jasbir Jain in *The Girl Child in the 20th century Indian Fiction*: p.78). We instantly recognise that Lenny in *Ice-Candy-Man* is a far cry from the girl-child whose presence is patterned on 'submission and subordination' (Ibid. p.78) Though she is located on the margins of her milieu – as a physically 'handicapped' 'girl' 'child' belonging to a 'religious minority', Lenny is lively, even demanding, very curious to 'know' things; and one who is dynamically involved in the construction of her identity. Not only the subjects of her narration but each inflexion in her voice, as she gives the account of her growth from childhood to

adolesence during the country's division, is significant. While the particular political crisis of the period awakens her with a jolt to her religious and national identities, her sexual identity is thrust upon her time and again as a matter of routine. More arbitrary than religious or national segregations, she realises that the gender divide cuts across class, race and community. Women and men have roles to play. In Colonel Bharucha's clinic where Lenny goes for her polio treatment, the doctor announces rather positively : "She's doing fine without school.... She doesn't need to become a professor..... She'll marry – have children – lead a carefree, happy life" (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.15). Before this meeting, Lenny reports that Colonel Bharucha was "applying stethoscope to the emaciated chest of an infant" who was accompanied by a father and a burka covered mother. Each time the doctor put a question regarding the infant's health, the husband consulted his wife:

> This time the woman addresses the doctor directly looking at him through the netting covering her eyes, "He vomits everytime he has milk... five, six times a day". Her voice is incredibly young. She couldn't be more that twelve, I think, surprised. (p. 12)

The narrator need not say more. Her surprise is a shocked recognition of the fate which awaits a girl child be it the twelve year old mother or be it the child-bride Papoo, a fate glamorised by Colonel Bharucha in his conciliatory definition of a woman's aim in life.

Both men and women inhabit Lenny's universe when she is young, but as she grows up, she develops an anxiety regarding men in spite of her interaction with Cousin, Ayah's wooers and her own father:

> The mystery of the women in the courtyard deepens. At night we hear them wailing, their cries verging on the inhuman ....
>
> And closer, and as upsetting, the caged voices of our parents fighting in their bedroom. Mother crying, wheedling. Father's terse, brash, indecipherable sentences. Terrifying thumps.... Although Father has never raised his hands to us, one day I surprise Mother at her bath and see the bruises on her body (p.212).

Nilufer Bharucha in her article "A Feminist Reading of Three Parsi Novels" points out that "Lenny... is not male - identified. She has strong female models with whom she has a woman - to - woman bonding" (*The Fiction of Rohintion Mistry* p.48). This bonding is not born instinctively, it occurs gradually just as her alienation from the men is a gradual process. As a child sensing a void in her life she gravitates towards her Godmother who has nurtured her instead of her biological mother. Extolling this relationship Lenny says that it is 'stronger than the bond of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women' (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.4). Her bonding with mother and Ayah are separate realms of experience.

Through them she is initiated into the norms of heterosexuality and romantic love. While Ayah's sexual life in particular is vicariously gratifying for Lenny, she finds herself recognising the appeal as well as exploitation of women's biological existence. Mother's marital sex life and Ayah's 'free love' are carefully counter balanced in Lenny's psyche (More of this in the later sections: 3.3.2 and 3.3.3).

These woman-to-woman bondings at the level of ordinary routines described in the novel mature into a stronger 'female bonding', which feminists extol, in the face of the women's victimisation in the communal violence of 1947. Lenny's ayah is rescued by the collective efforts of her mother and Godmother. Her new ayah, Hamida, herself a 'fallen woman' offers sympathetic nods and looks to the other women in the Recovered Women's camp. Though Lenny is just observing these developments – they fill her with a lot of questioning regarding the lives of women.

Dynamic, painful, struggling and posing — most women in Ice –*Candy – Man* live out the consequences of their relationship with men.

She wonders, why her father acts indifferent or superior to her mother and the mother pampers him still. What are fallen women? What are the things men do to women in Hira Mandi? Lenny's narrative poses these fundamental questions hence it operates as a 'feminist allegory' (Bharucha p. 48). Bharucha observes that through the character of Lenny, Sidhwa explores a female universe hemmed in by the restricting and reducing forces of patriarchy and colonialism (ibid.).

3.3.2 Lenny's Mother

Lenny's mother is not conspicuously 'feminist'. Instead, as an obliging wife, an accomplished hostess, a guilty mother and an attractive woman, she conforms to all the roles considered 'feminine' in patriarchal society. However, interest in this character as an individual is aroused only when she begins to drive out of the house with her car-load of petrol canisters. Lenny is always shown a little baffled by her mother's intractability in spite of her apparent feminity.

> Her motherliness. How can I describe it? While it is there it is all-encompassing voluptuous...but it switches off, this motherliness...it is treacherous. Mother's motherliness has a universal reach. Like her involuntary female magnetism it cannot be harnessed...I resent this largesse (*Ice-Candy-Man* p. 42).

This possessiveness for her parent and the consequent jealousy are easily transformed into suspicion regarding her actions later in the narrative. The children jump to the conclusion that in the climate of communal tension, Mother and Electric Aunt on their driving sprees actually go to set Lahore alight, when the truth is that they go out distributing petrol to people who need to cross the border. At one level the children's theory of their mothers' actions can be read as their tendency to fantasise, but at another – a deep-seated distrust can be read into their relationship. Why is it so?

Lenny is used to seeing her mother in the context of the latter's marital relationship with her husband. Inspite of Mother's charming presence she is necessarily an appendage to Father. She plays hostess to his friends, and humours his whims every day. Let us look at a passage on the mother's subservience in order to compare it with her role as a social worker during Partition:

> I hear the metallic peal of father's cycle bell and rush out to greet him. Mother rushed out of another door....
>
> Mother removes his wet curls back. ...Mother relieves him of the ledgers and taking hold of his other arm winds it around herself, making little moaning sounds as if his touch fills her with exquisite relief (Ibid p. 79).

To further interest him she indulges in some harmless lies and endless chatter –

> A little later, mention of Adi's hostile antics causes father to scowl... switching the bulletin immediately mother recounts some observation of my extraordinarily brilliant, saccharinely sweet and fetchingly naïve remarks (Ibid p. 79).

Lenny's observations are incisive enough for her to report Mother's behaviour critically. Only, she does not realise that the same sense of inadequacy which she detects at the bottom of her own need to concoct stories to "fill up the infernal time of father's mute meals" (p. 80) is also present in her mother's behaviour. Why does a woman overplay feminine subservience to her husband if not to make up for a void, an inadequacy (inspite of her best efforts) in their relationship. This is a paradigmatic

question that concerns not only Mother but also innumerable women across the globe.

Having subtly but firmly positioning this feminist concern, Sidhwa goes on to delineate this aspect of Mother's character since she belongs to the economically privileged strata of society. Lenny's mother has a number of servants to attend to her domestic chores, while socialising takes up all her time. It is largely into Ayah's care that the children are left. Though relieved of the dual duties of housekeeping which includes rearing children and socialising, mother has to face a guilt conscience for neglecting her children. "I don't know where I went wrong", she says, " It's my fault... I neglected her – left her to the care of Ayah. None of the other children who went to the same park contracted polio." (p. 16). Behind the roles of a formidable 'Baijee' of her household, we can detect the enormous pressures of socially constructed gender 'duties' that a mother is expected to fulfil. Excelling in some – she feels she has failed in some others; and in the midst of them Lenny notices her parents' marriage falling apart. The unrelieved irony of mother's predicament impresses itself upon Lenny's sensitive psyche as she grows up.

Mother's new 'avatar' as a social worker, who helps the victims of Partition cross over to their allotted nations and tries to rehabilitate the abducted, orphaned and raped women, is her partial release from her sorry state. She strikes a new chord in Lenny's heart once the child is told about the true purpose of her mother's manoeuvres. Through her character Sidhwa presents some of the commoner forms of woman's exploitation within her domestic sphere, and her ability to retain her sense of individuality in the midst of that exploitation.

3.3.3 The Ayah

Female sexuality with the ramification of its celebration as well as its exploitation by men is highlighted in Ayah's portrait. A substantial part of the narrative revolves around her character. It is through Ayah that Lenny is introduced to most of the people outside her family circle. When she moves around under her nanny's charge, her child's world expands to include awareness of community, nation, sexuality and barbarity.

It is interesting that while a nanny's role amounts to a paid extension of motherly functions – bathing, massaging, clothing the child and taking her to the park for fresh air – Lenny's Ayah has other correspondences with her mother, as well. In her pedestrian way she replicates mother's sex appeal. Like mother, she knows that she cannot afford to offend men but might get her way in the man's world through subterfuge. In the Victoria Garden where she walks with Lenny, Ayah accumulates a fleet of admirers including the Ice-candy-man, a masseur, a gardener, a restaurant owner, a zoo attendent, a knife – sharpening pathan and several more. Though yielding to none, she rules the roost. Lenny writes-

> I learn fast. I gain Ayah's goodwill and complicity by accommodating her need to meet friends and relatives. She takes me to fairs, cheap restaurants and slaughter houses. I cover up for her...I learn of human needs, frailties, cruelties and joys. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p. 20).

The men vie with each other, by turns to win her favour;while she dispenses it according to the degree to which they gratify her psycho – sexual needs. The Ayah is an assertive woman who, as shall be seen later in her story, holds her own even in the face of ineluctable misery.

Reading between the lines of Lenny's depiction of her Ayah we find that Shanta is a product of her circumstances. She is a Hindu girl of eighteen who is employed away from her family in Amritsar. Like the countless girls from poor homes she has to leave the protection of her parents to go out and earn. Employed in a relatively decent

profession and with good masters Shanta's condition is ultimately that of an unprotected young woman who has to fend for herself.

> The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars...drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, marked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle at her with lust (Ibid, p. 3).

The Ayah, conscious that she is a sex-object for the male gaze learns to manipulate her sexuality to achieve her meagre goals – from obtaining cheap bosky clothes or cashews from peddlers to the gratification of her 'female' ego. Hers is a strategy of survival that she rather enjoys though it reaffirms her exploitation. By playing her wooers one against the other for favour, she manages to remain intact in their midst for a good time.

It is difficult to overlook that while Lenny's mother's sexuality is marked with unfulfilled longing and anxiety, Ayah's is full-blooded and self-serving. It is through the latter that Lenny is able to differentiate between physical desire, romantic love and animal lust; " Ayah is nervous in [Sharbt Khan's] presence... they don't need to touch. His presence radiates a warmth that is different from the dark heat generated by Masseur's fingers – the lightning stroke of Ice-candy-man's toes" (Ibid, p. 75).

This distinction become obvious the moment Ayah's lover, the Masseur is murdered under the garb of communal hatred and Ayah herself abducted, sold, and raped, by the Ice-candy-man (who later marries her). In spite of his protestations of love and conciliatory apologies, he cannot restore Ayah's former warmth or spirit, far less win her love.

Between the characterisation of Ayah and Lenny's mother, Sidhwa is able to prompt a dialogue on female sexuality versus the male power structures within or outside their homes. Understandably, there are no happy marriages in this novel though there are several memorable sexual encounters. Lenny's parents get alienated; Rosy and Peter's parents are visibly incompatible, the Masseur is killed and Ayah's hope of loving union with him shattered; the Godmother and her old husband's relationship is merely a matter of mention; Lenny's tutors Mrs. Pen and her husband have the look of wasted carnal life. Imam Din's four marriages and insatiable lust undercut any possibility of matrimonial affection. Also there is Papoo's child marriage to a much older man.

The text is implicitly suggestive of an unbridgeable emotional rift between the sexes. The violent molesting of women and children under the excuse of communal revenge actually highlights the gender divide, which is more absolute and hostile than communal or racial fundamentalism. Women, once they fall prey to men's violence like Lenny's two ayahs, cannot hope for their restitution to their own families. Let us once again read this dialogue between Lenny and her godmother:

> "What's a fallen woman?" I ask Godmother....
> "Hamida (the second Ayah) was kidnapped by the Sikhs", says Godmother seriously... When that happens, sometimes, the husband- or his family – won't take her back."
> "Why? It isn't her fault she was kidnapped."
> "Some folk feel that way – they can't stand their woman being touched by other men" (Ibid, p. 215).

The conversation shows how inscrutable the unwritten laws of patriarchal constitution are. The women themselves often internalize these laws into their perception of self identity. For Hamida it is her ' kismet' to be shunned by her family. For women like Lenny's servant Mucho, her attitude to life is unthinkingly endorsed in her behaviour. She frantically beats up her daughter and later drugs her to marry

her off to an unlikely groom in an inexplicable act of parental duty. Nilufer Bharucha interprets Mucho's relationship with Papoo as a manifestation of self-hatred since she sees her daughter as an extension of herself. It is the consequence of her patriarchal up-bringing ("A Feminist Reading of Three Parsi Novels" p. 49). The violence that one woman inflicts upon another can be a subtler and more vicious version of violence inflicted by men upon their womenfolk.

In the character of Lenny's Godmother and of Slavesister, let us now explore how women inadvertently mime the social and personal hegemonies of patriarchy.

3.3.4 Godmother and Slavesister

Though Lenny is cared-for by her mother and her nurse, in the course of her daily routine, she responds the most to her Godmother, Rodabai.

> The bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust - and my loneliness to her compassion - is stronger than the bond of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women. (p.34)

The image of 'mother' in Lenny's consciousness is in fact split up into the three portraits of the Mother, Ayah and the Godmother. It is therefore imperative to analyse 'Godmother' viz. her actions and person, and viz. Lenny's perception of the character.

The narrative voice persistently celebrates her. Lenny's relationships with her godmother is rich with details, and is a mutually fulfilling one. The sheer presence of the latter is amply given credit to by the child who demands her due of forbidden knowledges, and attention from the mother figures. The godmother as a character, therefore, is almost entirely an idolised product of another character's opinion whom she gratifies in a super-motherly way. For a close reading of her character, we might at places have to read the narrative against its grain.

The godmother has a certain way with people. Her immense presence, comforting society, razor-sharp wit, resourcefulness and her social commitment make her an adorable character in the novel. As Subhash Chandra has identified, she is also endowed with a profound understanding of human existence. The most glorious example of her self-confidence, authoritativeness, capacity to handle crisis-situations deftly is provided by her dealing with the Ice-candy-man and the ayah's rescue. Subhash Chandra writes, 'Godmother concentrates in her character what the feminists feel is very important for a woman to realise her individuality: the feeling of 'self worth'." (p.180)

The strength of her personality, the magnitude of her affection for Lenny, and her coarse khaddar sarees covering her from head to food make her a very consistent and simple person to understand, it seems. For the preadolescent who is subjected to the baffling flux of life and range of attractions from all around her she has a sexless and steady appeal. Compare Lenny's comparison of her parents' behaviour when they are in company, with her response to Godmother's several faces.

> Half asleep I can still hear them laugh. Was that really Father? That communicative person making "pooch-pooch" noises...and that hooting, rollicking woman my remote and solemn mother? (p.65-66)

and

> She (godmother) catches my watering eye and winks. Only I ever see her wink. Her dignified bearing and noble features preclude winking. She relaxes her guard with me. No one sees her as I do. (p.33)

Justified admiration for the straight-forward character of Godmother notwithstanding, Lenny is unable to see the difference between the circumstances of her mother and her godmother. One depends upon her husband and society for her sense of self-worth while the other (godmother) is relatively free of such domestic and wifely care. The godmother and her household is indifferent of her 'Oldhusband's' presence in it. Instead, it is completely a woman's house with the wise and resourceful godmother at the helm of affairs - not having to please or placate a husband, not needing to entertain his friends or relatives. She is the head of the family with her younger sister to do all the household chores for her and to humour or tease according to her whim. We must not be blind to the fact that the hegemony in her household is a transposition of the man-dominating-the-wife pattern to the smarter woman-dominating-the cruder woman variation. Lenny calls the younger of the two sisters, 'Slavesister'. To the Slavesister's chargrin, Godmother can turn quite nasty towards her:

> "Don't think I've not been observing your tongue of late! If you're not careful, I'll snip it off..."
>
> "Really, Rodabai! How long will you treat me like a child?"
>
> "Till you grow up! God knows, you've grown older - and fatter - but not up! This child here has more sense than you. Now stop eating our heads. Say your prayers and go to sleep." Slavesister retreats to the kitchen and commences mumbling (164).

In a research on the declining Parsi population Ketayun Gould, a demographer, observed that unmarried state is common in the Parsi community. The average marrying age among Parsis is among the highest in the world ("The Parsis in India: A Community under Stress). Given these facts, an oldmaid of unenriched intellect and plain looks - like Slavesister - might have to put up with her family's insensitivity in lieu of the protection and company they might offer her.

At the same time, Godmother remains a positive and a fascinating character. A formidable matriarch, a sensitive guardian, an undaunted feminist she lashes out in anger at the Ice-candy-man. Resourceful as she is, she manages to trace the whereabouts of the ayah from within the burning and rioting Lahore, and has Ayah's kidnapper and husband, the Ice-candy-man before her.

> "You have permitted your wife to be disgraced! Destroyed her modesty! Lived off her womanhood! ...And you talk of princes and poets? You're the son of pigs and pimps! You're not worth the two cowries one throws at lepers!...
>
> "Get out of my sight, you whining *haramzada!* says Godmother (p.249).

She even threatens the Ice-candy-man with her obvious ability to have him put behind bars.

What gives the Godmother this authority? Is her existence itself constructed along the lines of an able patriarch or has she risen beyond sexuality?

Seen from Lenny's eyes it is as though Rodabai's person is above the push and grind of worldly affairs. She seems to have seen it all - the hostility between people, between sexes, their prejudices and their pains. And so, she is able to gather her inner as well as the outer resources and build up her strength to an awesome proportion in the moment of crisis. For the pre-adolescent, Godmother is at once a strong and sobering presence: almost a deity, an 'Earth Mother' figure.

Toril Moi, in her perceptive introduction to some of the important issues raised by feminism, warns against such tendencies to deify women as essences of a higher and purer nature, 'the tendency to venerate them as virgins and mothers of God...' ("*Feminist Literary Criticism*" p. 213). She explains that "gratifying though it is to be told that women really are strong, integrated, peace-living, nurturing and creative beings, this plethora of new virtues is no less essentialist than the old one, and no less oppressive to all those women who do not want to play the role of Earth Mother" (Ibid, p.210).

We, as readers, should be able to see that while Lenny idealizes Godmother, in her narration the godmother is humanized viz. her family relationships. This is sheer technical brilliance - possible only in the art of a writer who is aware of the different nuances of Feminist studies.

In an overview of all the women characters in the novel, the godmother's significance actually lies in her encouraging womanly confidence and inspiring self-worth in Lenny's evolving sensibility.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

In an interview Bapsi Sidhwa remarked : "As a woman, one is always marginalised. I have worked among women to create an awareness of their rights and protested against repressive measures aimed at Pakistani women and minority communities..." (*The Hindustan Times. Sunday Magazine* 26 April 1998).

This unit has tried to demonstrate that Sidhwa's novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*, highlights feminist concerns about women's issues, particularly their experience of victimisation and suppression within patriarchal societies.

Its protagonists are mostly women and each of them represents a way of life that either colludes with the premises of patriarchy or else challenges the patriarchal repressivness in the most unassuming manner. Mother, Mucho and Slavesister represent the first case. The transformed role of mother as a welfare activist, Ayah's sexuality and the resilience of her spirit and Godmother's positive qualities represent their redemptive potential.

Moreover, the novel is a *Buildungsroman* of a girl-child's consciousness. Her gradual assimilation into woman's sisterhood is the result of her first-hand-observation of the cunning with which the men she has known all her life betray and victimize the women around them. While she continues to respond to them and interact with them at a social and personal level i.e. while her position is not radical, she has learnt to recognise the 'sexual politics' that make women's and men's lives what they are in contemporary urban society.

3.5 GLOSSARY

Bosky: An archaic expression to describe a tight fitting garment covering the breasts.

Bildungsroman: It is the youthful development of a central character. A term used by German critics, it foresees the idea of travelling to gain experience.

Essentialization: The tendency to give simplistic and hence reductive definition to identities which are actually complex.

Female: Woman as a biological sex. The term refers to morphology rather than any specific characteristic.

Feminine: A gender construct that enables essentialization of female as an essence. Subordination, beauty and passivity are considered feminine.

Feminist: A way of radically questioning the gender stereotypes and a strategy to politicise women related studies.

Paradigm: An example or model used as a standard for the whole group of an archetype. Also the framework of theories and concepts forming the background of a scientific approach.

Promiscuity: Sexual activity with a number of partners usually in short casual relationships.

Polyvalent: Multiple points of view.

3.6 QUESTIONS

Q.1 What do you understand by the terms 'feminism' or 'feminist' and how do they differ from 'female' and 'feminine' in the critical vocabulary? Does this distinction help us to understand women's experiences better?

Q.2 Discuss the women characters in *Ice-Candy-Man* with reference to their roles in affecting Lenny's consciousness of her identity.

Q.3. Give a contrasted reading of Lenny's mother and Godmother in the novel.

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UNIT 4 PARSI IDENTITY IN *ICE-CANDY-MAN*

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
  4.1.1 The Parsi paradox and the British Raj
4.2 Identity Crises in *The Crow Eaters*
4.3 Debate at Warris Road
  4.3.1 Responses to Partition
4.4 The Parsi Tradition
  4.4.1 Nostalgia or preserving folk traditions
  4.4.2 Identity forming
4.5 Active neutrality of the Parsis during the communal holocaust
  4.5.1 The active role of Godmother
4.6 Let Us Sum Up
4.7 Glossary
4.8 Questions
4.9 Suggested Readings
4.10 Appendix

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are two-fold (a) to give a socio-political background of the Parsi paradox and the way it is represented in two of Bapsi Sidhwa's novels, *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice-Candy-Man*. The comparison is essential as what transpires in her novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is like a sequel to the earlier novel; (b) to provide a background of the Parsi ethos and the changing shape of the identity of this hybrid community during the communal riots of Partition. Taken together they convey the Parsi identity in this novel very aptly. It also shows Sidhwa's remarkable ability to parody some of the pretensions and attitudes of her own community. The illustrations from the text are taken from several chapters to provide a comprehensive view.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 The Parsi Paradox and the British Raj

The *London Times* of July 1905 made a pertinent remark about the Parsi community under the British Raj. It said, "whether from necessity or inclination, the Parsi of the twentieth century is almost a foreigner to the great mass of the Indian population as was his predecessor of the eighth century." The British regarded the Parsis as 'elite'. Sir J.R. Carnac, the English Governor of Bombay said on 11 August 1877: "Then, gentlemen Parsis, I would ask you to remember that you have what is called the very bluest blood in Asia." Thus the conscious anglicisation of the Parsis and their alienation from other Indian communities are major paradoxes which stem from certain historical factors.

The process of assimilation started in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Surat was the most important seaport on the west coast of India and a major trade centre for both the Moghul and European trading companies. Unimpeded by religious taboos or a dominant clergy, the early Parsis showed a lot of flexibility and developed commercial relationships with the foreigners. They were employed as chief brokers

in Portuguese, French, Dutch and English factories and soon became indispensable because of their knowledge of local customs and language and their adaptability in learning the language and manners of the foreigners. After the Portuguese relinquished Bombay to the British in 1661, Surat within a few decades lost its importance as a major trade centre. The British encouraged the early Parsi settlers and gave them land on Malabar Hill for the establishment of the first *Dokhma* or The Tower of Silence which is the place where the Parsis dispose their dead bodies. In India, they are located in Mumbai, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Calcutta. In other Indian cities Parsis bury their dead bodies. (see Appendix A). These early business contacts led to the growing understanding between the Parsis and the British. Parsi historians like Khusrau Edalji Ghamat stated, "The prosperity of the Parsis dated from the advent of the British rule in India." Thus throughout the nineteenth century, the Parsis identified themselves with the colonial power. This attitude was particularly evident during insurgency, when they were gaining lost territory and gathering information about enemy movements. (This reference is related to the 1857 War of Independence or the Sepoy Revolt, during which most of the Parsis supported the British). The British also cleverly raised the Parsi citizens to the rank of nobility which not only gave them prestige within their own community but also obligated them to the Crown. There were three Parsi baronets, and sixty-three Parsis were knighted till 1946.

Unhindered by religious opposition, academic education of girls and widespread emancipation of women spread by the middle of the nineteenth century. The trend of higher education for Parsi women started in 1842. That year Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy had his daughters educated in strictest secrecy to avoid criticism by the community on this "revolutionary innovation". Again during the same year, Meheribai Hormusjee Shroff let her daughter Dosebai attend an English private school. This created a great scandal amongst the conservative section of the Parsis, some of whom sent threatening letters and resolved to excommunicate the family. However such threats soon subsided and by 1870, over 1,000 Parsi girls had received the benefits of secondary education. Tradition was fully breached when around the middle of the nineteenth century, a group of young Parsi reformers, assembled at the Elphinstone College(Bombay) and decided to set up Parsi schools to assist education and reforms in the community. In 1863 the Alexandra Native Girls Education Institute was founded by Maneckjee Cursetjee. Several other Parsi schools were then founded. Although Gujarati was the medium of instruction, English was added as a second language. Soon English overtook Gujarati as the educational and cultural language of the Parsis. Education led to the quick acceptance of English standards in daily life. Clothes as well as eating habits changed. Homes were furnished with English furniture, pianos, violins and amongst the rich, crystal chandeliers. The intensive use of the English language, study of English literature and the enthusiasm for sports and drama all became part of the Parsi ethos between 1880 and 1920. With the advent of the Congress and the growth of the Indian National Movement, there was an apprehension amongst the Parsis that as a minority community they would become unimportant once India gained independence. These lurking fears, identity crises and the paradox of whether to remain loyal to the British Raj or be pragmatic and side with the Freedom Movement are aptly delineated by Bapsi Sidhwa in her novels, *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice-Candy-Man*. In both these novels the author uses irony, parody and at times witty conversation to create occasional humorous effects.

4.2 IDENTITY CRISES IN *THE CROW EATERS*

A striking manifestation of the identity crises which I mentioned in the previous section is evident in Bapsi Sidhwa's first published novel *The Crow Eaters* (1978). The protagonist who is the head of the family, the idiosyncratic Faredoon Junglewalla protests vehemently against the nationalist movement. He exhorts his off-spring to

remain loyal to the British Empire. Dadabhai Naoroji one of the founders of the Indian National Congress and a prominent leader in the Freedom Movement is referred to as "that misguided from Bombay" who started "something called Congress and keeps shooting off his mouth like a lunatic, 'Quit India! Quit India!'."

Fifty years after Independence such views may appear shocking but they were representative of many middle-class Parsis in the 1920s and 1930s, especially the business class, bankers and civil servants. So Bapsi Sidhwa is historically accurate in the way she presents the dominant views and collective traditions of her community during the last decades of the British Raj. The gruff caricature and paranoid sentiments of Faredoon Junglewalla are a clever ploy by the author which enables her to parody the lurking fears of the Parsi community. She shows that except for a fringe minority, drawn into the vortex of the Nationalist Movement, the majority of the Parsi community shared the views expressed by a dying Faredoon Junglewalla on the freedom struggle.

> He (Dadabhai Naoroji) utters ideas. People like Gandhi pick them up...people like Vallabhai Patel and Bose and Jinnah and Nehru...and that other fool in Karachi, Adil Mama. What does he do? He sacrifices his business and abandons his family to the vicissitudes of poverty. He wears a Gandhi cap, handloom shirt and the transparent diaper they call a dhoti. He goes in and out of jail as if he were visiting a nautch girl at the Hira Mandi. Where will it get him?...Nowhere!....Biting the hand that feeds! I tell you we are betrayed by our own kind, by our own blood! The fools will break up the country. The Hindus will have one part, Muslims the other, Sikhs, Bengalis, Tamils and God knows who else will have their share, and they won't want you! (*The Crow Eaters* p.282).

The apprehensions of Faredoon Junglewalla are not the figment of a dying man's frenzied imagination but based on social reality. There were three anti-Parsi riots in Bombay and other cities on the west coast in 1851, 1874 and 1921. On the last occasion, Gandhi had called for a boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales to India. Many Parsis resisted this boycott which sparked off a violent riot (there were fifteen reported deaths.) Such incidents led to anti-Parsi feelings, which were often experienced by this minority community in their daily lives. So fears of local harassment and memories of the previous violent incidents became an integral part of the Parsi milieu and increased their loyalty to the British. However displaying characteristic adaptability, Faredoon Junglewalla makes a perceptive remark about the necessity of changing allegiances as Independence became inevitable. In reply to his son-in-law Bobby Katrak, the ageing Faredoon makes a prophetic reply:

> We will stay where we are...Let Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or whoever rule. What does it matter. The sun will continue to rise — and to set—in their arses. (*The Crow Eaters* p.283)

Such witty caricature and genial satire both shocks and offends Parsi sensibilities in the sub-continent but they are the hallmarks of Bapsi Sidhwa's style of writing. It is an expression of minority discourse and an exposure of the attitudes and paradoxes of this miniscule community.

I have dwelt at length on Faredoon Junglewalla's fears about Independence in *The Crow Eaters* because it is a socio-political theme that has fascinated Bapsi Sidhwa. A similar kind of paranoia, the same paradoxes and dilemmas are repeated in *Ice-Candy-Man*. In the earlier novel, that Parsi paradox about Independence is presented through the ravings and prophecies of an individual. In *Ice-Candy-Man*, the similar dilemma is presented in the form of an acrimonious debate amongst different members of the community. The urgency is now greater as both Independence and Partition are inevitable and round the corner. So we see a thread of continusly and a recurring political theme in the novels of Bapsi Sidhwa, which provide a lesligeist

reading of the text. It represents a movement of the times from the late twenties and early thirties to the mid-forties. The fears expressed by the Parsi community in this debate also reflect the minority community's apprehensions of being swamped by the majority community and its culture. Hence the problem of the Parsi identity crises. Now I would like to examine the various reactions of numerous Parsi characters in *Ice-Candy-Man* about the crucial issue of whether to extend support to "Swaraj" or not.

4.3 THE DEBATE AT WARRIS ROAD

The Parsis have always considered themselves as superior, hybrid, westernised and idolised by the British. These prevailing folk traditions are on the verge of getting shattered due to the impending political change. Thus a central Parsi consciousness is carefully examined and delineated in the debate at the fire temple hall at Warris Road. This exuberant, brainstorming session enables Sidhwa to provide some perceptive insights into the marginalised personality traits of the community. She also shows how many Parsis are cultural hybrids, living and sharing intimately in the cultural life, languages, traditions, moral codes and political loyalties of two distinct peoples, which never completely interpenetrated and fused. So Sidhwa uses this political debate to present a sociological critique of her own community.

The Parsi paradox of whether to support "Swaraj" or to maintain their loyalty to the British Raj is humorously delineated. A piquant touch is given to this dilemma. With the impending news of Independence, the paranoid feelings of the Parsis, a miniscule minority get accentuated. The Parsis in Lahore at a special meeting at their temple hall at Warris Road, have an acrimonious debate on the political situation. The meeting expresses the insecurity of the Parsis not because of communal antagonism, but the apprehension of their status at the departure of the British. Already the unstinted loyalty to the British is declining. Colonel Bharucha and Lenny's father blame the British for bringing polio to India. So at the meeting, India's smallest minority are trying to redefine their strategy which Colonel Bharucha claims as "We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare". (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.16)

The ambivalent attitude of the Parsis towards Partition and Independence emerges when Colonel Bharucha, the president of the community in Lahore advocates status quo. He urges fellow Parsis to shun the anti-colonial movement and the nationalist agitation spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. His reasoning is based on expediency. If there is 'Home Rule', political glory, fame and fortune will be acquired by the two major communities, Hindus and Muslim. He considers Home Rule as a power struggle, saying "No doubt the men in jail are opportunists....They know they will acquire instant martyrdom and political glory ....But this short cut to fame and fortune is not for us. It is no longer just a struggle for Home Rule. It is turning into a struggle for power. Who's going to rule once we get Swaraj?" (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.36). He also advocates caution, because of the Parsis long standing attitudes of loyalty to the British. This attitude stemmed from the Zoroastrian religious belief of loyalty to a ruler and a close relationship between state and community. The other cause for loyalty to the British was purely economic. The Parsis primarily traced their secured status as a prosperous minority to British rule, identified as the "good government" of the Afringan prayer. So loyalty was a self-evident precept. Thus Colonel Bharucha does not want any Parsi of Lahore to offend British sensibilities by espousing nationalist causes. In a tone of admonition he says, "I hope no Lahore Parsi will be stupid enough to court trouble— I strongly advise all of you to stay at home— and out of trouble". (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.37)

4.3.1 Responses to Partition

In her first novel *The Crow Eaters* (1978) Bapsi Sidhwa portrayed the dying businessman Faredoon Junglewalla vehemently protesting against the nationalist movement and exhorting his offspring to remain loyal to the British Empire. Colonel Bharucha in *Ice-Candy-Man* has a somewhat similar attitude. However with Independence and Partition inevitable, there is a subtle change in the attitude of the different people of Lahore. The patriarchal advice of Colonel Bharucha is opposed. Dr. Mody promptly poses a plea for involvement in the Freedom struggle. He says, "our neighbours will think we are betraying them and siding with the English"(*Ice-Candy-Man* p.37). The banker Mr. Toddywalla says that the different Parsis should support the Indian community which appears to be in a dominant position or will acquire political power after Independence. So he asks the assembled congregation to formulate attitudes and actions on Independence based on self-interest. Finally the assembled Parsis resolve to remain in Lahore and abide by the rules of the land. They agree to Colonel Bharucha's suggestion, "Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian we will abide by the rules of their land". (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.39)

Some Parsis in the congregation express apprehensions about remaining in Lahore after Independence and wish to migrate either to London or Bombay where a majority of their co-religionists live. However such fears get overruled. The final resolution is one of adaptability and compromise. The President of the Lahore Parsis says, "As long as we conduct our lives quietly; as long as we present no threat to anybody; we will prosper right here,...." (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.40). Through this animated conversation, Bapsi Sidhwa reveals the implicit, lurking fear of the Parsis, that the vulnerable minority, will get swamped by the majority communities either Hindus in India or Muslims in Pakistan. So even amongst the Parsis in undivided India, the Partition sparked off an impulse towards migration from their homelands. Bombay was opted for, primarily due to the safety in numbers rather than the safeguards of democratic India. Historically however the movement to Bombay, as the novelist also indicates was minimal. The Parsis remain in urban areas of India and Pakistan, trying to preserve their identity by not meddling in political matters. The advice of Mr. Toddywalla is followed, "But don't try to prosper immoderately. And remember don't ever try to exercise real power". (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.40)

Amidst banter, repartee and humour Bapsi Sidhwa subtly portrays the underlying fears of the Parsis about Partition and Independence. The depiction of their mental turmoil can be compared to John Master's depiction of the plight of the Eurasians commonly called Anglo-Indians before the British left the sub-continent. In his novel, *Bhowani Junction* (1954), John Masters aptly depicts the identity crises of the Anglo-Indians. For instance the loud-mouthed and arrogant Peter Taylor talks of going 'home' to England (which he has never seen) and wears his solar hat all day to be recognised as an Englishman. Even the anglicised Peter Taylor has a foreboding of impending Independence. He asks Victoria in sheer frustration, "What are we going to do?" (*Bhowani Junction* p.42) Knowing that they could become neither English nor Indian, Taylor's conclusion is "We could only stay where we were and be what we were"(*Bhowani Junction* p.21). This shows how Taylor and the Anglo-Indian community have become prisoners of circumstances. Bapsi Sidhwa shows how the Parsis are similar captives of the circumstances in the upheavel of Partition.

Adaptability being part of their social code, the Parsis of Lahore adjust to the changes after Partition. In *The Crow Eaters*, Bapsi Sidhwa had only hinted at the necessity to alter allegiance after Independence but in *Ice-Candy-Man*, the shift in attitudes is depicted. Lenny suffers from polio and the disease is considered as another example of British treachery. Later in the novel, Lenny's mother, Mrs. Sethi works with other women to organise relief camps for the riot affected people and assists in rehabilitation of destitute women. Lenny's Godmother rescues the Hindu ayah forcibly married to her former Muslim friend, the seller of ice-candies. The Godmother helps Ayah return to Amritsar, under police escort. There is already a

sense of involvement with the new reality as Lenny's parents and Godmother try to bring some semblance of sanity in frenzied Lahore.

4.4 THE PARSI TRADITION

4.4.1 Nostalgia or Preserving Folk Traditions

During the colonial period, the Parsis could be divided into two distinct types, the nationalist Parsi and the Anglophile Parsi, the latter being in the majority. In her novel on Partition, Bapsi Sidhwa shows the Parsi paradox in different situations. Initially this hybrid community is uncertain whether to seek identity with the mainstream in India or Pakistan or to seek migration to the West. Unlike Jews or the Chinese, the Parsi diaspora yearns for neither a spiritual nor a familial homeland and their allegiances are to the tribe or place of settlement. So the problem of migration is treated at times with mock-seriousness and comedy in the novel.

Before I comment on Sidhwa's presentation of the Parsis' need to assert a distinct identity and the postcolonial concern for cultural autonomy, I would like to show that historically Parsi writers have displayed diasporic traits and highlighted identity forming problems. For instance the pre-colonial oral tradition of the Gujarati folk song— Garba— records the arrival of the first band of Parsis to India and the conditions upon which they were given refuge. The Persian text, *Kissah Sanjan* by Kaikobad Sanjana in 1600 A.D., tells the same story but in the written tradition. Both these texts valorize the glorious Persian past, the Persian empire, ancient Iranian heroes and detail the life of the prophet Zarathushtra and his monotheistic religion. Colonial Parsi writers like Behram Malbari and Cornelia Sorabji also display diasporic traits of nostalgia and loss in their poetry, fiction and autobiographical work. So Bapsi Sidhwa is part of this tradition. However there is another dimension to the works of Bapsi Sidhwa who belongs to the second generation of post-colonial Indian English writers. This period coincides with what Edward Said has called the second stage of anti-colonial resistance, "the charting of cultural territory", or the attempt to shake off the socio-cultural domination of the erstwhile coloniser. The charting of cultural territory as pointed out by several postcolonial critics such as Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak involves a repossession of history and its politicisation. In the case of Bapsi Sidhwa the battle for cultural territory involves a demographic question. As the end of the twentieth century approaches, the Parsis are in demographic decline. Late marriages, a low birth rate, marriages outside the fold by Parsi women whose offspring are then not accepted as Parsis, and a ban on conversions has led to a rapidly declining population. It is estimated that only about 100,000 Parsis survive in the world today. So the writings of Bapsi Sidhwa and other Parsi novelists like Rohinton Mistry help to preserve a record of how the Parsis lived and they recall certain ethno-religious characteristics. As I will show in the next section, by citing some examples from the text, identity forming is a central concern for the Parsis.

4.4.2 Identity Forming

Through many incidents in the novel, Bapsi Sidhwa shows that as communal discord increases, the Parsis also become conscious of their identity. For example the verbal skirmishes between the butcher and the masseur on the one side and the government house gardener, Sher Singh and the wrestler restaurant-owner on the other, show how deep the pattern of communal discord among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs has become. The novelist implies that such acrimonious communal relations augurs ill for the three communities as Partition looms large on the horizon.

These widening differences are filtered through the prism of the Parsi character-narrator Lenny. Her response to such communal discord is discerning as it shows

that the Parsis become aware of religious differences due to the ensuing communal turmoil. Lenny and by implication the author herself remarks:

> Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh, Mountbatten are names I hear. And I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves — and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah---she is also a token. A Hindu. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.93)

By such seemingly casual but pertinent observations of the precocious child narrator, Sidhwa shows that the composite culture that had evolved in India for centuries was slowly disappearing and instead the various communities had become aware of their individual status. Even lovers change. As time passes, Lenny becomes aware of the new found religious fervour among Ayah's admirers. The child narrator also notices how men remain huddled in groups and discuss the adverse influence of an imminent Partition. In such a surcharged atmosphere the reactions of Lenny often reflect the existing Parsi attitudes. Initially in such an atmosphere of heightened communal consciousness, the Parsis are reduced to "irrelevant nomenclatures"(Ibid, p.94). Initially the small minority community is apprehensive but treats the situation in a mocking manner. The author cleverly ridicules such differences by showing the classification of jokes. "Cousin erupts with a fresh crop of Sikh jokes. And there are Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and Christian jokes." (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.95)

The communal discord is not confined to the cities but has even spread to the villages. On her second visit to the village Pir Pindo, Lenny goes along with members of Imam Din's family to Dera Tek Singh on the occasion of Baisakhi. Imam Din's family lives in the Muslim village of Pir Pindo. Lenny and some members of Imam Din's family travel to check if the tension of the cities has spread and find that communal discord has extended to the rural areas. Baspsi Sidhwa in characteristic style presents the lurking tension very subtly in the sensitive observations of a young Muslim boy, Ranna. In the midst of the joyful celebration at the Baisakhi festival, Ranna senses the lingering doubt, fear and suspicion. Bapsi Sidhwa captures the feeling of alienation:

> And despite the gaiety and distractions Ranna senses the chill spread by the presence of strangers; their unexpected faces harsh and cold. A Sikh youth whom Ranna has met a few times, and who has always been kind, pretends not to notice Ranna. Other men, who would normally smile at Ranna, slide their eyes past. Little by little, without his being aware of it, his smile becomes strained and his laughter strident. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.106)

The apathy of Ranna's friends is symptomatic of the tension which the arrival of the Akalis in Dera Tek Singh had generated. This lingering communal tension is not just a child's sensitive observations but Ranna's father Dost Mohammed also notices the surcharged feelings. The patterns of communal relations between Lenny's first and second visit to Pir Pindo are noticeably different. During her first visit, it was apparent that communal tension had not affected the rural areas. The Sikhs and Muslim had pledged their lives to save each other from any intruders. Yet during her second visit the feelings of communal harmony had declined, mainly due to what Sidhwa presents as the influence of nationalist politics. Thus the communal harmony had been replaced by a pattern of fear and suspicion between the two communities. It is thus seen that in the pre-Partition era there is communal amity between the Hindus and Sikhs and as a group they are opposed to the Muslims. The initial section of the novel, written in almost lyrical fashion, from a child's perspective, deals with the widening communal schisms and discord. The author shows that the worsening situation leads to a change in the attitudes of the Parsi community from passive neutrality to active involvement in humanitarian causes to aid the victims of Partition. The author does not imply any motives for this. However she hints that it could stem

from either the motive of self preservation or the Zoroastrian ethic of good deeds or the desire to set an example of humanitarian work to benefit their friends.

4.5 ACTIVE NEUTRALITY OF THE PARSIS DURING THE COMMUNAL HOLOCAUST

In the dominant discourses on the Partition, the Parsis are hardly ever mentioned as playing a role in the historical processes and the tragic consequences of Partition. Sidhwa deliberately contradicts the received discourses by showing the silent but active role played by Lenny's parents and her aunt Godmother in helping the victims of Partition, irrespective of their community. Lenny's parents help in the rehabilitation of the orphaned Ranna and the destitute woman Hamida. Lenny's mother undertakes many secret outings to smuggle rationed petrol to "help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away"(*Ice-Candy-Man* p.242). Sidhwa uses these incidents to show how the Parsi community in Lahore were not indifferent to the mayhem and atrocities of Partition. She also highlights how the Parsis, affected by the chaos all around them have moved from passive neutrality to active neutrality. So this becomes another phase in the identity forming of the Parsis. It can also be seen as the author's attempt to write an alternate history which contradicts the received histories. I would now like to describe the role of the Godmother to illustrate the active neutrality of the Parsis.

4.5.1 The Active Role of Godmother

Lenny's Godmother (one of her aunts) whose name is Rodabai shows exemplary social commitment and ability to influence individuals and manipulate the system. The author shows how the Godmother goes out of her way to rescue Ayah, get her enrolled in the Recovered Women's Camp and then helps her (Ayah's real name is Shanta) to return to her relatives in Lahore. Earlier in the novel, Ayah had been kidnapped by a gang led by the Ice-candy-man. Ayah's lover initially keeps her as a dancing girl and then marries her. She is re-named Mumtaz. Godmother reduces the Ice-candy-man to a state of complete bewilderment by her "rage and terror" (p.249) and fierce verbal attack. She calls him a "shameless badmash! Nimakharam! Faithless!" (p.248). In her cold rage she also calls him a "low-born, two-bit evil little mouse!" (p.248) and the "son of pigs and pimps" (p.249). Godmother's righteous indignation and her reputation as a fierce and fearless woman makes the Ice-candy-man capitulate. Once Godmother is convinced that Ayah is being kept against her will she even visits the disreputable "Hira Mandi". She speaks to Ayah and realises that the latter wants to break up her marriage and return to her family in Amritsar. It is Godmother who arranges the rescue, using her influence and contacts. The deft handling of the crisis shows the active role of the Godmother, an example of the little remembered humanitarian deeds performed by the Parsis during the troubled days of Partition.

The Godmother is not only a good samaritan but she also cajoles Ayah to recover her spirit and confidence in life. In the aftermath of the incidents, Ayah has become morose. The understanding Godmother consoles Ayah and says:

> That was fated daughter. It can't be undone. But it can be forgiven...Worse things are forgiven. Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt, happiness...all fade impartially...to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That's the way of life. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.262)

Her wisdom, kindness and understanding are reflected in these words of advice to the shattered Ayah. Sidhwa stresses that such incidents are not isolated but reflect the

overall humanitarian approach and involvement of the Parsis in moments of crisis and extreme stress.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

As we have read, the Parsi paradox stems from a long historical association with the British. Several social factors, such as absence of any religious taboos, adaptability in learning the language and manners of the foreigners and emphasis on education led to proximity with the British and subsequent prosperity. Sidhwa uses this paradox very effectively in literature. She chronicles the changing attitudes to the British, in a time period from the 1920s to the months prior to Partition in 1947. All the apprehensions of this miniscule minority get reflected in their confusion of whether to support Swaraj or not. The major fears are losing status and submersion of identity. The problem of identity for this cosmopolitan community is related to the changing political scenario, the end of the colonial era and the departure of the British. This problem is reflected humorously as is shown in the above section in two of her books *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice-Candy-Man*.

Identity forming as we have seen is a central concern for the Parsis and is historically reflected in their literature. So we see that as communal discord increased in the months prior to Partition and Independence, the Parsis also become aware of their identity. Initially it is a passive neutrality that the Parsis maintain. They try to caricature or joke about the communal discord and lack of trust among the major communities. Ultimately however the Parsis react to the complex historical process. Sidhwa shows that contrary to the views of the dominant discourses the Parsis were not indifferent or passive onlookers but acted with passion to provide humanitarian relief to the distressed.

4.7 GLOSSARY

Afringhan: A prayer of benediction or thanksgiving offered by the Parsis.

Baronet: A rank of nobility during the British Raj. It is a rank of honour below a baron and above a knight.

Diaspora: The migration or scattering of a nation's people or the movement of a community of people to another region.

Hybrid: A person produced by the blending of two diverse cultures or traditions.

Milieu: A word of French origin which means environment or surroundings.

Paradox: A contradiction between two equally plausible statements or positions.

Repartee: A conversation passing to and fro between people, full of sharp and witty retorts.

Samaritan: A biblical term meaning a benefactor or helper or good person.

4.8 QUESTIONS

Q.1. Trace the socio-cultural background of the Parsi paradox.

Q.2. What is the Parsi paradox? Give an outline of how it is presented in both *The Crow Eaters* and *Ice-Candy-Man?*

Q.3. How and why did the Parsis change their attitude from passive neutrality to active neutrality during the communal holocaust?

4.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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4.10 APPENDIX

Towers of Silence

The English phrase, 'Towers of Silence', for the original *Dakhma* or *Dokhma* was coined by Robert Xavier Murphy, some time English translator to the Government of Bombay in the late nineteenth century.

As the Achaemenians held sacred the three elements of earth, fire and water, the corpse could neither be buried, burnt or immersed. Dead bodies were, therefore, exposed on mountain tops, or placed in towers specially built for this purpose. The ancient Iranians then collected the dried bones and placed them in ossuaries, or deposited them in tombs, built or cut in the rock.

The word *Dakhma* is used in the sense of 'a receptacle for the dead'. The *Dakhma* is built on high ground wherever possible. The Tower is a massive structure of solid stone, about ninety metres in circumference. Steps from the ground lead to an iron gate which opens on a circular platform of stone with a well in the centre. The platform is paved with large stone slabs divided into three rows of shallow, open receptacles. The first row is for males, the second for females, and the third for children. There are holes in the inner side of the well through which rain water is carried into four underground drains at the base of the Tower. These drains are connected with four underground wells, the bottoms of which are covered with thick layers of sand. Pieces of charcoal and sandstone are placed at the end of each drain, and the charcoal is replaced from time to time. Thus, the rain water passing over the bones is purified before entering the soil, in keeping with the ancient command that the earth shall not be polluted. (Chrishman Iran. *p. 162*: J.J. Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, Bombay, 1937, pp. 65-70, 231-238).

UNIT 5 *ICE-CANDY-MAN* AS A NOVEL OF PARTITION

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
  5.1.1 The Partition Novel
5.2 Sidhwa's political stance
  5.2.1 The politics of Partition
  5.2.2 Role of Jinnah
5.3 The use of political events
  5.3.1 Historical signposts
  5.3.2 The visit of Gandhi
  5.3.3 Scenes of violence
5.4 Dislocation and sense of loss
  5.4.1 The human toll
  5.4.2 Parody and brutalisation
5.5 Narrative techniques
  5.5.1 Similarity with Attia Hosain
  5.5.2 The use of allegory
  5.5.3 Role of rumour
5.6 Bigotry
  5.6.1 The pretender
  5.6.2 Perils of communal frenzy
5.7 Let Us Sum Up
5.8 Glossary
5.9 Questions
5.10 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The immediate objective of this Unit is to show how Bapsi Sidhwa uses the genre of the Partition novel to present the Pakistani perspective on Partition, a reappraisel of the role of politicians like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah and a woman's perspective on the great communal divide showing dislocation, emotional turmoil and sense of loss. One of the major objectives of this unit is to present Bapsi Sidhwa's political stance that politicians keep shifting their role, remain remote, indifferent and manipulative whilst heroic actions are performed by ordinary people. Partition as an offshoot of fundamentalism sparked by hardening communal attitudes is also probed. Further the genre of the Partition novel in English has been examined to see how *Ice-Candy-Man* is both similar and different to such novels. In this novel the narrative technique is quite unusual as it combines laughter, ribaldry, a passion for history and truth telling.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

5.1.1 The Partition Novel

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* was first published in London in 1988. In the 1991 American edition, this title was changed to *Cracking India*, because the publishers felt Americans would misunderstand "ice candy" and confuse it with drugs. The novel is set in pre-partition India in Lahore. It belongs to the genre of the Partition novel like Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in The Ganges* (1964), Chaman Nahal's

Azadi (1975), Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), B. Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1959) and to a certain extent Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980). These books present the Indian perception of the Partition holocaust. Mehr Nigar Masroor's *Shadows of Time* (1987) and Mumtaz Shahnawaz's *The Heart Divided* (1957) present the Pakistani version of these violent and tragic events. Both the versions are however free from religious bias and written more in agony and compassion than in anger. However in the overall genre of Indian-English fiction, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* is the third novel on Partition by a woman author. A couple of years earlier, Mehr Nigar Masroor had written a novel about the impact of time on families divided by Partition. The first novel by a woman author on these traumatic events was *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hosain. Both Attia Hosain and Bapsi Sidhwa share similar perspectives on the calamities of Partition. The denouement of both novels is comparable as they stress the vulnerability of human lives. The Partition relentlessly divided friends, families, lovers and neighbours in both countries.

Overall, *Ice-Candy-Man* is a novel of upheavel which includes a cast of characters from all communities — Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Parsis. Thus a multiple perspective of Partition emerges as viewed by all the affected people. However what really distinguishes Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* is the prism of Parsi sensitivity through which the cataclysmic event is depicted. It is the only novel written by a Parsi on the theme of Partition. This makes it unique. Another fascinating aspect of this novel is the use of the child narrator, the precocious Parsi girl Lenny. Lenny is like the persona that Chaucer adopts in his *Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* rendering credibility by being almost a part of the reader's consciousness. It is a device which is a source of sharp irony and enables Bapsi Sidhwa to treat a historical moment such as Partition without morbidity, pedantic display or censure. The unique aspect of this Partition novel is that the author throughout maintains for us a balance between laughter and despair.

The change of attitude of the Parsi community, the impact of violence on the girl-child narrator, the use of allegory to depict the horrors of Partition, the role of rumour, the dangers of communal frenzy and the rise of obscurantism are all aspects of the Partition which get reflected in *Ice-Candy-Man*. I will show in the subsequent sub-divisions how the author uses witty banter, irony and parody in her sensitive handling of the impact of Partition on the Parsi community, the girl-child narrator and deteriorating human relationships. It is these aspects which makes Bapsi Sidhwa's novel unusual. Otherwise the cruelty, the horrors, the human loss and dislocation of Partition have been chronicled in the works of other Partition novelists.

5.2 SIDHWA'S POLITICAL STANCE

5.2.1 The Politics of Partition

Ice-Candy-Man comprises thirty two chapters and provides a glimpse into the cataclysmic events and turmoil on the Indian sub-continent during Partition. Historic truth is a backdrop of the novel and the focus is on the personal fate of the character Ice-candy-man, the deteriorating human relationships and communal discord. However Bapsi Sidhwa's political stance in this novel is of great importance.

The novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is deeply political in its retelling of the events of Partition from a Pakistani rather than an Indian perspective (a more detailed analysis of this theme is in Unit-6, 'The Post-Colonial Perspective'), so the *Ice-Candy-Man* is a politically motivated novel. Sidhwa admits this in a conversation with David Montenegro cited in *Points of Departure – International Writers on Writing and Politics*, 1989.

> The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the Partition of India and Pakistan... What has been written has been written by the British and the Indians. Naturally they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I'd researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate injustice. I felt whatever little I could do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what the facts were. (p.36)

The major Indian political figures of that time, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lord Mountbatten, Subhash Chandra Bose, are either caricatured or presented in a slightly unfavourable manner in this novel. This is all part of Sidhwa's conscious design as such political figures are shown as inconsistent and shifting from one position to another. Sidhwa is deliberately playing the role of the iconoclast. She is trying to reassess Gandhi's place in history. During the political debate in Queen's Gardens, one of the characters the masseur (Ayah's lover) soothingly says of Gandhi, "He's a politician yaar, ... it's his business to suit his tongue to the moment" (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.91). Gandhi's visit to Lahore is also gently parodied by the author. The child narrator Lenny's immediate observation of Gandhi is unfavourable. She innocently compares him to her gardener Hari. She says:

> He is small, dark, shrivelled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has a disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look, ...(*Ice-Candy-Man* p.86).

So Gandhi's Lahore visit is deliberately demystified. He is not presented as a political saint. Instead he talks about personal hygiene and nothing profound but "flush your system with an enema, daughter," (p.87). So Lenny dislikes Gandhi and thinks of him as "an improbable mixture of a demon and a clown" (p.87). Sidhwa told David Montenegro that she was reacting to a lot of literature and the film *Gandhi*, which sanitised him into a saint. She said, "He's not human in that film. And I tried to humanise him." (*Points of Departure*...)

Sidhwa makes her Pakistani bias quite evident in *Ice-Candy-Man* when she suggests how Partition favoured India over Pakistan.

> The Hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri, they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequence of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus: ... They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot without which Muslim Kashmir cannot be secured. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.159)

Eminent Indian novelist Shashi Tharoor has objected to Sidhwa's use of the word "grant", noting that the British did not grant Kashmir to India. This outburst on Kashmir is by Lenny and it can be construed as the outburst of the girl-child narrator. It is true that Lenny is not the author but in a *New York Times* interview to Laurel Graeber on 6 Oct.1991, Sidhwa says, "Gandhi really sowed the seeds of Partition and turned the whole independence struggle into a Hindu movement. It's hard for people in the West, where he is deified, to regard him as a petty manipulative politician." (p.11) Laurel Graeber in his article also concludes that, "Bapsi Sidhwa has attempted to give a Pakistani perspective to the Partition of India." (p.110) Creditably Sidhwa, however rises above petty nationalism or any form of jingoism. Her novel does not uphold the Two-Nation theory behind the creation of Pakistan. In other words, she does not stress the belief of Pakistani Muslims of the necessity of Partition and the creation of Pakistan. In fact *Ice-Candy-Man* suggests that religious and cultural differences are artificially created and deliberately fostered. Again through Lenny's perspective, Sidhwa shows how religious differences are deliberately exploited on the eve of Partition.

> Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh, Mountbatten are names I hear And I become aware of religious differences It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindle into symbols. . .(*Ice-Candy-Man* p 93)

Human beings also change, as Lenny observes. The devotional fervour is aroused in the Ayah and she spends a small fortune on worshipping the gods and goddesses in the temples. Imam Din and Yusuf become religious zealots and take Friday afternoons off for the "Jumha prayers"(93). The lower caste Hari, Moti the sweeper and his family become even more untouchable. The English Christians look down upon the Anglo Indians and the latter are scornful of the Indian Christians. So this is the human tool of the politics of Partition. As we can see in this section, Bapsi Sidhwa presents a Pakistani version of the horrors of Partition. An alternate version of history is being presented through fiction, an aspect which I will examine in the next section in the depiction of Muhammed Ali Jinnah.

5.2.2 Role of Jinnah

Using fiction as a shaping force in history, Sidhwa tries to redefine the role of Jinnah She strongly feels that the depiction of Jinnah in history written by the Indians and the British is unfair. She feels he was caricatured "as a very stiff villain of the piece". Thus she tells David Montenegro:

> And I felt in *Ice-Candy-Man*, I was just redressing, in a small way, a very grievous wrong that has been done to Jinnah and Pakistanis by many Indian and British writers. They've dehumanised him, made him a symbol of the sort of person who brought about the Partition of India...whereas in reality he was the only constitutional man who didn't sway crowds by rhetoric. (*Points of Departure* p.50)

In the novel, a major reference to Jinnah is aptly made in the context of the Parsi family that is the focus of the novel. Lenny comes across the picture of an "astonishingly beautiful woman" and is told that it is the picture of Jinnah's wife. A Parsi woman, she married the Muslim Jinnah and risked censure by her wealthy, knighted father and her family. The marriage as history suggests was not very happy and the beautiful wife died of a broken heart. In this context Sidhwa does not completely exonerate Jinnah but she manages to blur the criticism by noting that Jinnah too died of a broken heart in September 1948. She stresses that she is on Jinnah's side:

> But didn't Jinnah too, die of a broken heart? And today, forty years later, in films of Gandhi's and Mountbatten's lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah who for a decade was known as 'Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity' is caricatured and portrayed as a monster. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.160)

In this same chapter, there is also a fascinating contrast between Nehru and Jinnah, presented by Lenny. However the observations reflect not only Sidhwa's views but the gossip about the two leaders that Lenny has overheard from the servants, the retinue of Ayah's admirers and local people. So it is a type of received history. Nehru is presented as charming, suave, handsome and "with an aura of power and a presence"(p.159). There is also a touch of scandal. "He bandies words with Lady Mountbatten and is presumed to be her lover"(p.150). In contrast Jinnah "is incapable of compliments"(p.159). He is described as austere and deathly ill (reference to the cancer of which he died in September 1948 soon after the formation of Pakistan). The author implies that Nehru was successful with the British and has always received praise as a statesman because he was charming and urbane. Her concern is that Jinnah has not received his due because he was 'past the prime of his elegant manhood"

(p.160), sallow and uncompromising. In revealing the image of Jinnah, Sidhwa again displays the important presence of hindsight in her fiction ("Today, forty years later"). She further justifies her portrayal of Jinnah by using a quotation from the Indian poet and freedom fighter, Sarojini Naidu, which praises the founder of Pakistan's appearance, manners, idealism, demeanor and wisdom. The novelist has therefore adopted a historicist approach in her portrayal of Jinnah.

5.3 THE USE OF POLITICAL EVENTS

5.3.1 Historical Signposts

Marianne Wiggins in a scathing review of *Ice-Candy Man* for the *New Statesman* (26 Feb., 1998. p.26) says that the choice of the marginalised narrator, a child, a female, a Parsi and a victim of polio mars the political impact of this book. Despite Wiggins' view what I would like to suggest in this section is that Partition is the shaping force of this novel and the author uses political events very subtly to add to the effect. Another critic, Alamgir Hashmi does not share Marianne Wiggins' hostility towards Sidhwa's narrator but has some reservations about the historical content of the novel. Yet what I would like to stress is that the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* is both historicist and with a political bias in its retelling of the events of Partition from a Pakistani rather than an Indian perspective. It is a novel with a modified historicist approach which subtly depicts political events so that they are interwoven with the flow of the narrative.

At times the author does not follow chronology or exact dates in presentation of historical events. For instance there is a reference to Gandhi's intention "to walk a hundred miles to the ocean to make salt"(*Ice-Candy-Man* p.36). The time scale is totally erroneous. Gandhi's famous salt march to Dandi Beach took place in the early months of 1930, not in the pre-Partition months of 1947.However this is not an inaccurate historical detail, deliberately used by the author. Rather it suggests a blurring of the narrator's memory. What Lenny is told and what she remembers hearing first hand, often merge. So this reference of Gandhi for Lenny is a received truth even if it is historically out of its time. The historical references or signposts in this novel are limited because Lenny does not understand much of what she hears. As Lenny herself says:

> Obviously he's (Ice-candy-man) quoting this Bose. Sometimes he quotes Gandhi or Nehru or Jinnah but I'm fed up of hearing about them. Mother, father and their friends are always saying : Gandhi said this, Nehru said that. Gandhi did this Jinnah did that. What's the point of talking so much about people we don't know? (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.29)

5.3.2 The Visit of Gandhi

Other significant historical events occur in the novel. For instance, Sidhwa shows Mahatma Gandhi visiting Lahore. At the particular context in history which forms the back drop for this novel, the pre Partition months of 1947, the visit of Gandhi may not be historically accurate. There is no recorded evidence of Gandhi visiting Lahore and speaking to the people in the early months of 1947. However it is a fictional rendering based on similar visits Gandhi made to various parts of the sub-continent. More significantly, the presence of Gandhi in Lahore allows Bapsi Sidhwa to reassess his place in history. In the novel, Gandhi is depicted as talking to Lenny and her mother about "enemas and clogged intestines"(p.87). The child Lenny is bewildered that this frail man is considered so famous. When she looks at his eyes she discovers compassion, tolerance and as the child gauges, "everything that is feminine, funny, gentle, loving (p87) Her instinctive reaction is.

> He is a man who loves women. And lame children. And the untouchable sweeper's constipated girl-child best. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.87)

However a different image of Gandhi emerges when she recalls the meeting with him some years later. Now it is not the child narrator Lenny who is reacting but a grown up and mature narrator. The other side of Gandhi that is recalled is somewhat sinister:

> It wasn't until some years later—when I realised the full scope and dimension of the massacres — that I comprehended the concealed nature of the ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi's nonviolent exterior.(*Ice-Candy-Man* p.88)

So the author uses the observations of Lenny to deliberately erase the mystique of Gandhi. I would like to stress that this is another aspect of the Partition novel, in which the author has used political events to reassess the role of important historical characters, in history.

5.3.3 Scenes of Violence

Some of the other political events mentioned in the novel are Tara Singh's visit to Lahore and the passionate speeches of the Akali leader about the necessity of preserving undivided India. His place in history is also reassessed. Sidhwa calls him "the Sikh soldier-saint" and he is described in images of violence, "holding a long sword in each hand, the curved steel reflecting the sun's glare as he clashes the sword above his head" (p.133). His tone is aggressive and challenging:

> We will see how the Muslim swine gets Pakistan. We will fight to the last man! We will show them who will leave Lahore! Raj Karega Khalsa, aki rahi na koi! (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.134).

The portrayal of a volatile Akali leader Master Tara Singh, is part of Sidhwa's political game plan and her understanding of history. She is of the view that the Muslims in East Punjab suffered more because of organised violence by the Sikhs who were manipulated by politicians.

Similarly there is a vivid description of the Sikh's attack on the Muslim village of Pir Pindo in the Punjab. Again the description of the attack may not be historically accurate but such attacks took place frequently during the turmoil caused by Partition. The delineation of brutality by the Sikhs is again part of Sidhwa's political strategy to present the Pakistani perspective. She explains to David Montenegro:

> The Sikhs perpetrated the much greater brutality—they wanted Punjab to be divided. A peasant is rooted to his soil. The only way to uproot him was to kill him or scare him out of his wits.(*Points of Departure* p.36)

The child narrator also confuses the burning of Lahore and mob violence with the celebration of Holi. This is a deliberate ironic perspective. The Holi festival celebrates brotherhood, and spontaneous joy "when everybody splatters everybody with coloured water and coloured powders and laughs and romps..."(p.134). But instead of joy there was bloodshed. Sidhwa tersely depicts the skyline of the old walled city ablaze, and people splattering each other with blood!"(p.134). The scenes of violence during the Holi festival are all part of Sidhwa's historic vision that gullible mobs were inflamed by self-motivated political leaders to perpetuate violence.

5.4 DISLOCATION AND SENSE OF LOSS

5.4.1 The Human Toll

In this section, I will examine how Bapsi Sidhwa aptly shows the inexorable logic of Partition which moves on relentlessly leaving even sane people and friends helpless and ineffective. She at times uses the technique of reportage. Bare facts present the horror of the greatest communal divide in history. The neighbours of the Sethis, Mr. and Mrs. Singh hurriedly leave Lahore with their two children and a few belongings. Other goods are left behind with Lenny's parents. Sher Singh the zoo attendant flees from Lahore due to insecurity after his brother-in-law is killed. Similarly the students fraternity of King Edward's Medical College is disrupted. Prakash and his family migrate to Delhi and Rahool Singh and his pretty sisters are escorted to a convoy to Amritsar. In Lenny's household, the gardener Hari is circumcised and becomes Himmat Ali and Moti becomes David Massih, showing the politics of compromise and survival. Ayah's lover the masseur's mutilated dead body is found in a gunny sack. The money lender Kirpa Ram flees leaving guineas and other wealth behind Communal mayhem and riots cross the class divide. Even middle-class families like the Shankers flee in haste.

In rural areas the Muslim village of Pir Pindo is attacked at dawn and swamped by Sikhs. Men, women and children are massacred. Bapsi Sidhwa as a sensitive novelist shows that humanitarian deeds are performed by individuals like Rodabai, known as Godmother, Lenny's mother and Jagjeet who with a furtive group of Sikhs visit the Muslim village of Pir Pindo under cover of darkness to warn them of an impending Akali attack. The novelist is also very practical and wordly wise. She shows that individual acts of kindness and bravery can only help some victims and alleviate their misery but not stem the tide of organised violence.

Partition is shown as a series of images and events depicting human loss and agony. The dislocation of settled life is revealed by Lenny's understanding of the demographic change in Lahore. In awe she observes that Lahore is no more cosmopolitan. The Sikhs and Hindus have fled.

> Lahore is suddenly emptied of yet another hoary dimension: there are no Brahmins with caste marks – or Hindus in dhotis with bodhis. Only hordes of Muslim refugees. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.175)

The child narrator senses the difference and pain caused by the huge exchange of populations. The dislocation and uprootedness of Partition is experienced by Lenny and her brother Adi as they drift through Queen's Gardens searching in vain for familiar faces and acquaintances.

> Adi and I wander from group to group peering into faces beneath white skull-caps and above ascetic beards. - ...I feel uneasy. Like Hamida I do not fit. I know we will not find familiar faces here. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.237)

The dislocation of life during Partition caused emotional upheavels. This is best exemplified by the attitude of Lenny when she learns that Masseur one of Ayah's several admirers has proposed marriage. Even in the child there is a feeling of insecurity as she clings to Ayah's hands and cajoles her not to marry the masseur as it would entail separation.

5.4.2 Parody and Brutalisation

The Partition novels of Manohar Malgaonkar, Khushwant Singh and Chaman Nahal focus on Punjab and the dislocation of life and emotional turmoil in that region. So Bapsi Sidhwa's novel is similar to the novels in this genre. The only difference is that

the pointless brutality of communal frenzy is parodied as it is presented and narrated by the child narrator Lenny. The properties of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are destroyed as the author implies that ire knows no religion.

The terror of the fight for Lahore between Muslims and Sikhs is palpable. For the child narrator it is a spectacle, a variation from routine life, but mingled with terror and horror. The shrieks of "Pakistan Murdabad! Sat Sri Akaal! Bolay so nihaal!" of the Sikh mobs when listening to Master Tara Singh at Queen's Garden and "Allah-o-Akbar! Yaaa Ali! And Pakistan Zindabad!" of the rampaging Muslim mobs give Lenny as many nightmares as when she recollects the roaring of the lions in the zoo. With such subtle comparisons and ironic exposures, Sidhwa shows the brutalisation which communal frenzy causes. Even lovers turn hostile.

The Ice-candy-man, the Muslim lover of the Hindu Ayah watches Shalmi and Mozang Chowk burn with, "the muscles in his face tight with a strange exhilaration I never want to see" (p.136). The transformation of a fun loving man who frolicked and acted the buffoon in the park, into an ogre is conveyed by Lenny's horror at the sadism in his face. It is a vivid image which is a stark reminder of the brutality of the times. Subtle insinuations, images and gestures enable Bapsi Sidhwa handle the delicate and sensitive theme of Partition without verbosity and sensationalism. The horror of human loss, bloodshed and separation is portrayed without lurid details and maudlin sentimentality.

In the next section, I will carefully examine some of the narrative techniques and devices used by Bapsi Sidhwa in this novel.

5.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

5.5.1 Similarity with Attia Hosain

There are certain striking similarities between Bapsi Sidhwa's novel and Attia Hosain's sensitive Partition novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961). Both these women novelists use a narrator heroine with considerable merit. Attia Hosain's narrator heroine Laila reveals the trauma of Partition through her memories and insights of the Taluqdar family disintegrating. In the same way the enigma and traumas of Partition are sensitively handled in the *Ice-Candy-Man.*

In *Sunlight on a Broken Column* when Laila's cousin, Zahra who is married in Pakistan returns to her ancestral home at Hasanpur, she quarrels with her cousin about the protection of Muslim culture and language. The disagreements are now no longer youthful verbal quarrels but echo bigger divisions. Lenny too by observation and instinct surmises the dislocation caused by Partition, just as Laila also shows the cruelty of parting ways when she says,

> In the end, inevitably we quarreled, and though we made up before we parted I realised that the ties which had kept families together for centuries had been loosened beyond repair. (*Sunlight on a Broken Column* p.303)

Like Lenny, the grown-up Laila is also both nostalgic and restless. When Laila wanders about in her disbanded ancestral home "Ashiana" after Partition, memories come flooding back. However it is not nostalgia for the old order to return. Her new found identity and struggle to be Ameer's lover and wife, curbs any desire for a return to the cloistered feudal order. Instead her horizons have broadened and she has come to detest dogmatism, either in the name of religion or radicalism. Her mature perspectives on life developed after intense personal struggle enable Laila to tackle the loss of her husband Ameer and the trauma of Partition without rancour or excessive grief.

So both narrator heroines react against communal responses and the horrors of violence. The mature Laila rationalises against communal tension whereas the young Lenny instinctively reacts against the horrors of Partition. There are also other similarities. Both narrator heroines realise there are no easy solutions to communal holocausts except intense struggle against dogmatism. Laila's concerted attempts at breaking from traditional customs, the negation of despair and recognition of struggle are upheld by Attia Hosain. Her narrator does not lapse into a glorification of the past or take refuge in mysticism, epicureanism or jingoism. Similarly Bapsi Sidhwa shows there are no easy winners in the communal holocausts of Partition. The use of narrators enable both Bapsi Sidhwa and Attia Hosain to maintain their story-telling pace and prevent the narrative from declining into a sentimental plot. This is done by blending socio-political events with personal observations and reactions. It is achieved either through the childlike innocence or naivety of Lenny or the rationalised approach of Laila.

5.5.2 The Use of Allegory

Allegory is another literary device used by Bapsi Sidhwa to depict the trauma of Partition. The child Lenny is affected by the violence at Lahore.

> The whole world is burning. The air on my face is so hot I think my flesh and clothes will catch fire. I start screaming: hysterically sobbing. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.137)

The scenes of violence and arson and above all the venemous hatred of friends who had months earlier insisted on the impossibility of violence, have a frightening impact on the young Lenny. Violence breeds violence and Lenny is also a victim. Her rage is directed at her collection of dolls. In a frenzy she acts. "I pick out a big, bloated celluloid doll. I turn it upside down and pull its legs apart. The elastic that holds them together stretches easily. I let one leg go and it snaps back, attaching itself to the brittle torso"(p.138). The destructive urge overcomes Lenny and she is not satisfied till assisted by her brother Adi she wrenches out the legs of the doll and examines the spilled insides. This violent act by Lenny is an apt allegory on the mindless violence of Partition. With a morbid sense of humour, Bapsi Sidhwa reveals how the Partition had uprooted people of different communities, irrespective of ideology, friendship and rational ideas. In such a depiction, Bapsi Sidhwa captures the horror portrayed by William Golding in *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Golding indicated that there is a thin line between good and evil in human beings and it is only the structures of civilisation which prevent the lurking evil from being rampant. In *Lord of the Flies*, the boys of Jack's tribe get a sadistic delight in hunting Ralph. The situation is saved as a naval officer reaches the island and by his presence curbs the pointless brutality of the abandoned boys. Golding wrote this novel after World War II and the allegorical meaning was evident. In the world of fiction, a grown up steps in to curb the atrocities and brutality of the boys, but when countries commit atrocities there is no restraining power. Lenny's destruction of the doll also has allegorical significance. It shows how even a young girl is powerless to stem the tide of surging violence within thereby implying that grown up fanatics enmeshed in communal frenzy are similarly trapped into brutal out bursts. Lenny breaks down and cries at her destructiveness, a sombre message by the novelist that unless there is rethinking, cruelty and insensitivity become a way of life, such is the conditioning of communalism.

5.5.3 Role of Rumour

Bapsi Sidhwa subtly delineates the psychological impact of the horrors of Partition. The communal frenzy has a distorting effect on people and leads to feelings of suspicion, distrust and susceptibility to rumours. Even the children, Lenny, Adi and Cousin are suspicious of any minor deviations from normal behaviour. Mrs. Sethi and

Aunt Minnie travel all over Lahore in the car but do not take the children with them. Deprived of long drives, Lenny and her cousin are intrigued at the movements of their mothers. Ayah enhances the sense of mystery when she states that the dicky of the car is full of cans of petrol. The author shows that in a highly charged atmosphere, suspicion and distrust become inevitable. The Ayah is also suspicious about the movements of cans of petrol by the two Parsi ladies. If she suspects they are distributing petrol to the arsonists she does not say so. The three children are stupefied by this revelation and let their imagination run wild. Finally they come to the same conclusion.

> We know who the arsonists are. Our mothers are setting fire to Lahore! ... My heart pounds at the damnation that awaits their souls. My knees quake at the horror of their imminent arrest. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.173)

Bapsi Sidhwa cleverly parodies the suspicion of the children. The imaginary fears of Lenny, Adi and their cousin are a source of humour but also a grim reminder of how rumour becomes institutionalised in a tense atmosphere. The children only fantasize about their mother's dangerous acts but the author shows how rumour preys upon the frenzied minds of men vitiated by communal hatred. On the radio there is news of trouble at Gurdaspur which the ice-candy-man and his friends at once interpret as "there is uncontrollable butchering going on in Gurdaspur"(p.149). There are further rumours of a train full of dead bodies coming to Lahore from Gurdaspur. The Ice-candy-man returns panting after a frantic cycle ride and adds to the horror, by describing the atrocities on women and says the dead are all Muslims. The acquaintances of Queen's Garden believe this rumour and harbour a feeling of revenge against the Sikhs. They now look with hatred on their long standing friend Sher Singh compelling the latter to flee from Lahore.

In the vitiated communal atmosphere, insanity prevails as ordinary men lose their rationality. Such a degradation is best exmplified in the rage of the Ice-candy-man who says,

> I'll tell you to your face—I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur...that night I went mad, I tell you. I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I'd known all my life! I hated their guts (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.156).

Revenge becomes the major motivation for the Ice-candy-man and his friends. The role of rumour and the consequent pattern of violence shown by Bapsi Sidhwa is very contemporary as similar patterns are depicted by Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Using the narrative technique of revealing events by reading old newspaper reports, Amitav Ghosh shows how communal violence spread in Calcutta and cities of erstwhile East Pakistan in 1964. The poisoning of water, the trains of dead bodies, all incredible rumours, further inflated the communal frenzy.

Amitav Ghosh's novel is very relevant as it shows how fanatics thrived on the spread of rumours which intensified feelings of anger and triggered off violence. The bland newspaper reports and the memory technique of Amitav Ghosh removes the impact of horror that is caused by communal riots. Historical episodes sometimes collapse in memory. The 1964 Calcutta riots could be the 1984 Delhi riots, the 1987 Meerut riots or in recent times the 1989 Bhagalpur killings. They all follow a similar pattern, suspicion, distrust, rumour activating conditioned minds, all sources of terrifying communal violence.

Very perceptively Amitav Ghosh shows how different cultures and communities are becoming antagonistic to a point of no return. Hence in *The Shadow Lines* he effectively uses political allegory to stress the need for a syncretic civilisation to avoid a communal holcaust. Bapsi Sidhwa's view is a parallel. The message in Bisham Sahni's novel *Tamas*, that "those who forget history are condemned to repeat

it." is applicable to the *Ice-Candy-Man* also. The novel written at a time when religious and ethnic violence threatened the disintegration of the sub-continent, is an apt warning of the dangers of communal frenzy. Bapsi Sidhwa shows that during such upheaval, sanity, human feelings and past friendships are forgotten. At the Queen's Park in Lahore, friends and colleagues had argued endlessly about the impossibility of betrayal of friendships. Yet ironically, whilst the elders, Masseur, Butcher, Ice-Candy-Man, Sher Singh and Ayah gossip about national politics the child narrator senses the change:

I can't put my finger on it—but there is a subtle change in the Queen's Garden. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p. 96)

5.6 BIGOTRY

5.6.1 The Pretender

The author implies that the events at Queen's Garden are a reflection of a crystallisation of feelings at a larger scale in Lahore and other cities of India. Cultural and religious exclusivity leads initially to indifference and later to contempt which becomes the breeding ground for communal violence and bigotry. With a subtle parody, Bapsi Sidhwa conveys the dangers of social exclusivity. The Ice-candy-man, in striking attire enters the Queen's Garden, "thumping a five-foot iron trident with bells tied near its base"(p.97). He is in the guise of a holy man and chants 'Ya Allah!'. With his ash-smeared face and eccentric manner he pretends to be Allah's telephone. The author implies that in an atmosphere which encourages religious bigotry, even charlatans emerge as godmen. The difference between appearance and reality is slim. The Ice-candy-man's buffoonery gets taken as real. Burkha clad as well as smartly dressed women call him 'Sufi Sahib'. A bearded man inquires if Allah will grant his wife a son. The Ice-candy-man pretends to talk to God on the telephone. The scene is ludicrous and a source of rich humour. However amidst laughter the real meaning to such clowning emerges. The Ice-candy-man's antics provoke amusement but it is a pointer to the duplicity of people in the name of religion. Their sheer gullibility is exposed in a scene vividly described:

> Suddenly he springs up. Thumping his noisy trident on the ground, performing a curious jumping dance, he shouts: Wah Allah! Wah Allah! so loudly that several people who have been watching the goings-on from afar, hastily get up and scamper over. Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims form a thick circle round us. ... I can tell from the reverent faces around me that they believe they are in the presence of a holyman crazed by his love of God. And the madder the mystic, the greater his power. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p. 99)

The message is clear. If charlatans can arouse such fervour, then obscurantism needs little prodding to slide into bigotry.

5.6.2 Perils of Communal Frenzy

The secular group of Ayah's admirers maintain a façade of unity by cracking ribald jokes on community characteristics. However very soon they also become vicious and fall a prey to communal frenzy. The Ice-candy-man is part of the rampaging mob which abducts Ayah and keeps her in the brothels of Hira Mandi. So even the passion of love is powerless against religious bigotry. Later in the novel, the Ice-candy-man attempts to make amends. He forcibly marries Ayah, changes her name to Mumtaz and recites love poetry to her. But even here love is shown as powerless. Ayah has a revulsion for her newly acquired Muslim identity. With the help of Lenny's Godmother she is taken to a Recovered Woman's Camp and then sent to her family

in Amritsar. The Ice-candy-man, now a "deflated poet, a collapsed pedlar" follows her to Amristar in vain. Their relationship is severed forever, one more victim of frenzy and Partition. Love does not conquer all, when communal and obscurantist passions are aroused.

With a sprinkling of humour, parody and allegory Bapsi Sidhwa conveys a sinister warning of the dangers of compromising with religious fundamentalism. Otherwise a certain inevitability marks this historical process. Though her novel is about the trauma of Partition, Bapsi Sidhwa like Amitav Ghosh reveals that communal riots are contemporaneous and her message is like Bisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1973), that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

A historicist reading of *Ice-Candy-Man* involves an understanding of how it is a unique Partition novel, with its use of the girl-child narrator, witty banter, irony and parody and the use of a variety of narrative techniques to sustain the racy story. The politics of Partition, the divide between the Hindus and Sikhs on the one hand and the Muslims on the other are all carefully delineated. In this section, the author's view on Gandhi, Jinnah and the turmoil of Partition reflect her world view that it is important to have a Pakistani version of history. She has always believed that Partition is as much a part of Pakistani history as it is part of Indian history. So she presents an alternate history of that shared horror. In her handling of political events, Sidhwa shows how politicians, the remote icy men in power, play roles that manipulate ordinary people whereas it is only some committed individuals like Godmother, Mrs. Sethi and Jagjeet Singh who "battle wrongs". Subtle insinuations and images along with parody enable the author to sensitively handle the dislocation and loss caused by Partition. Also there is her veiled message that communal hatred cannot be wished away and is not just an offshoot of Partition. She warns that bigotry will prevail, unless people learn from the lessons of history. Overall this section shows how Sidhwa with examples sustained by imagination, compassion, parody and irony continually enables us to apprehend the trauma and agony of Partition.

5.8 GLOSSARY

Allegory: A work in which the characters or events have symbolic meaning and illustrate a moral or spiritual theme; It expresses by means of symbolic fictional figures, truths or generalisations about human existence.

Bigotry: A state or atmosphere or situation of extreme prejudice and intolerance.

Caricature: A portrait of a person such as a cartoon or a written parody, exaggerating the features and qualities for comic or satirical effect. Also a copy or imitation that is ridiculously inadequate.

Contemporaneous: Existing or occurring or originating during the same time.

Charlatan: A person who claims to be an expert but is fake.

Dogmatism: Pedantic, stubborn or committed to a theory.

Historicist: An interpretation that takes historical realities into consideration.

Holocaust: Historically it refers to the mass killing of the Jews by order of the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. The meaning can also be extended to mean great destruction by fire.

Iconoclast: Historically a breaker or opponent of sacred images during the Reformation. Nowadays this word also means an enemy of traditional institutions or ideas.

Parody: Imitation or representation that is crudely distorted, a type of satire or to mock at something.

Ribald: Coarse or indecent joking, humorous in a lewd, vulgar way.

Syncretic : An attempt to reconcile differing beliefs or religious value systems

5.9 QUESTIONS

Q.1. Comment on Sidhwa's presentation of Gandhi and Jinnah in the novel.

Q.2. Analyse Sidhwa's use of political events in the pre-Partition months.

Q.3. Discuss the manner in which Sidhwa presents human loss in this novel.

Q.4. Comment on Sidhwa's use of narrative techniques in the novel.

5.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Background Material

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UNIT 6 BAPSI SIDHWA'S *ICE-CANDY-MAN* : A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 What is the postcolonial?
6.2 What is the function of a postcolonial writer?
6.3 Strategies employed by a postcolonial writer
6.4 *Ice-Candy-Man*: an analysis
6.5 Sidhwa's use of the English language
6.6 Let Us Sum Up
6.7 Glossary
6.8 Questions
6.9 Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to analyse Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* from a postcolonial perspective, with special reference to her creation of an alternate history of the sub-continent and her use of the English language.

6.1 WHAT IS THE POSTCOLONIAL?

The phenomenon of colonialism has had a major influence in shaping the lives of three-quarters of the people living in the world. The influence extends not just to the political and economic spheres but to the cultural as well. The impact is perhaps best expressed by the art and literature produced in the erstwhile colonies. Bill Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) uses the term postcolonial to "cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day"(p.2). Consequently, according to this definition, the literature written in the colonized countries from the moment of colonization till the present day can be termed as postcolonial literature. The literature of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia. Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka are all postcolonial literatures. Technically the literature of U.S.A should also be placed in this category, but because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played, its postcolonial nature has not been generally recognized. Bill Ashcroft et al observe that what makes each of these literatures distinctly postcolonial is that "they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre" (Ibid, 2).

However an important point to be remembered is that the term postcolonial is also used for denoting a perspective or a theory- -meaning a post-colonial perspective or a postcolonial reading of a text which is not necessarily produced or written in the erstwhile colonies. For instance, Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* does not fall in the category of postcolonial literature but the play can be read from a postcolonial perspective. A reading which can highlight, for instance, how Shakespeare anticipates the psychological implications of the phenomenon of colonialism. However, Aime Cesaire's *A Tempest* (1969), an adaptation of Shakespeare's play, can be included in

the category of postcolonial literature since it is not only written by a postcolonial writer but specifically deals with the phenomenon.

6.2 WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF A POSTCOLONIAL WRITER?

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer, in his work *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) observes:

> The real aim of colonialism was to control peoples' wealth... colonialism imposed its control on the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.(p.16)

To achieve this aim the colonizers deliberately undervalue a "peoples' culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, and literature and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser" (Ibid, 16). Thus one of the main functions of the postcolonial writer is to rehabilitate the faith of colonised people in their own culture, art, religion, history etc and thereby liberate them from the chains of mental colonisation which continues to exist even after the country has gained independence. This purpose is perhaps best summed up by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, who in his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) wanted to show "that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity" (qtd. in Griffiths 13).

6.3 STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY THE POSTCOLONIAL WRITER

Various strategies are used by the postcolonial writers in order to meet their purpose. A detailed discussion of the various strategies is beyond the scope of a study such as this. However, we can discuss some of the strategies which will help us to analyze Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* from a postcolonial perspective.

a) As mentioned earlier, one of the main factors of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs the language of the colonizer as a 'standard' and the native languages are marginalized as impurities. "Language becomes the medium though which a hierarchical structure is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (*Empire Writes Back* p.7). Since language is used as a medium of power it becomes imperative that "post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (Ibid, 38). Thus adapting the colonizer's language to suit his/her purposes becomes the prime objective of the post-colonial writer. There are two ways in which it is done. " The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remolding the language to

new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (Ibid, 38). Later we will discuss how Sidhwa remoulds the English language for her purposes.

b) As mentioned earlier, the colonizer devalues the culture, literature, history etc of the colonized. A postcolonial writer can counter this process by giving an alternate version of history. Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* counters the European notions of African history by writing an alternate history highlighting the African culture. Bapsi Sidhwa in the *Ice-Candy-Man* rewrites history to undercut not only the British but also the Indian version of the history of the vast South Asian sub-continent.

6.4 *ICE-CANDY-MAN* : AN ANALYSIS

Let us now see how Bapsi Sidhwa writes an alternate history to counter the British and Indian view of the history of the Indian sub-continent.

Sidhwa's re-writing of history is far more complex than it appears to be, since she is re-writing history not just from the Pakistani point of view but also from the Parsi point of view. In order to highlight the Parsi dilemma at the time of the Partition she goes back thirteen hundred years to the significant moment in Parsi history, when they "were kicked out of Persia by the Arabs" and "sailed to India" (37). After waiting for four days on the Indian coast they were visited by the Grand *Vazir*, with a glass of milk filled to the brim, symbolizing that his land was full and prosperous and in no need of "outsiders with a different religion and alien ways to disturb the harmony" (38). However the Parsi forefathers , intelligently, " stirred a teaspoon of sugar into the milk and sent it back " (39), symbolizing that the Parsis "would get absorbed into his country like sugar in the milk ... And with their decency and industry sweeten the lives of his subjects" (39). The short account, whether true or not, is elaborated in detail, earlier in this block in unit 1.5. In her fictional account however Bapsi Sidhwa highlights the dilemma the Parsis have faced over the centuries i.e. the dilemma of assimilating themselves into an alien culture and risking the loss of their identity.

The impending Partition of the country, as depicted in the novel, might prove that all the efforts the Parsis have made over the centuries to assimilate themselves into Indian culture are futile since the community all of a sudden faces the threat of extinction in the wake of the Partition. Thirteen hundred years ago the Parsis had tried to accept Indian culture with all its diversities, but now at the moment of Partition they might be forced to take sides with one of the dominant religious communities in India—Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs. Thus Sidhwa undercuts the received historical view that the Parsis were totally indifferent to the partition of the country. Instead of indifference the Parsis had a complex attitude towards Partition, as brought out in the main-hall meeting in the Fire Temple. Colonel Bharucha, the president of the community in Lahore, argues that the Parsis should shun the anti colonial movement and stick to their long standing stance of loyalty to the British Empire. He warns the Parsis that once they get *Swaraj*, "Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jokers jump into the middle you'll be mingled into chutney!" (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.36). However Dr. Moody points out that it is not so simple. The Parsis cannot remain uninvolved and will have to take a stance otherwise, "our neighbours will think that we are betraying them and siding with the English" (p.37). This, however leads to a further complication, as voiced by a fellow Parsi, when he asks: "Which of your neighbors are you going to betray?... Hindu? Muslim? Sikhs?" (p.37). This remark brings to the foreground the bitter fact that even after thirteen hundred years the Parsis feel alienated in the subcontinent. Their alienation from all the major communities in India ultimately forces them to

support "whoever rules Lahore" (p.34). Col. Bharucha suggests, "Let whoever wishes to rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. We will abide by the rules of the land" (p.39). Thus Sidhwa by giving voice to the marginalized Parsis demonstrates that their choice of remaining neutral in the context of the Partition was not out of indifference but forced upon them by a complex historical process.

Sidhwa, further, demonstrates that the neutral stance adopted by the Parsi community towards the freedom struggle did not prevent them from participating in the developments in whichever way they could. M.F. Salat observes that Sidhwa contradicts the received discourses through showing the "silent but positive role played by Lenny's parents in helping both the Hindus and the Muslims" (*Magic Writings*.. 102), suggesting that "the Parsis too were involved in their own ways in the events of the time and that they were not just indifferent and passive onlookers to the awful human tragedy" (Ibid, 102). Salat observes that it is a revelation meant not only for Lenny but also for all those who are ignorant of the Parsi involvement in the Partition when Lenny's mother explains the secret of her outings. She explains: "I wish I'd told you ... we were only smuggling the rationed petrol to help our Hindu and Sikh friends to run away. And also for the convoys to send kidnapped women, like our Ayah, to their families across the border" (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.242).

Sidhwa, as mentioned earlier, rewrites history not only from the Parsi point of view but also from the Pakistani point of view. In an interview with David Montenegro, she clearly states this agenda.

> The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the Partition of India and Pakistan ... what has been written has been written by the British and Indians. Naturally they reflect their bias. And they have I felt after I'd researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer as a human being, one just does not tolerate injustice. I felt whatever little I could do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what the facts were. (*Points of Departure* p.36)

To counter the British and Indian versions of the Partition, Sidhwa in the *Ice-Candy-Man* not only tries to resurrect the image of Jinnah but also demystifies the image of Gandhi and Nehru. Jinnah in the novel is highlighted as an "ambassador of Hindu, Muslim unity" (p.160): "Today forty years later, in films of Gandhi's and Mountbatten's times, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah who for a decade was known as an 'ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity', is caricatured and portrayed as a monster"(p.160). To substantiate this image of Jinnah, Sidhwa quotes the Indian poetess Sarojini Naidu :

> The calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve masks, for those who knew him, a naive and eager humanity, an intuition quick and tender as a woman's, a humour gay and winning as a child's - pre-eminently rational and practical, discreet and dispassionate in his estimate and acceptance of life, the obvious sanity and serenity of his worldly wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man. (p.161)

The sublime image of Gandhi constructed by British and Indian historians is totally undercut when he is seen through the eyes of the seven year old narrator, Lenny: "He [Gandhi] is small, dark, shriveled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has a disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look; and no one'd dare pull off his dhoti! He wears only the loin cloth and his black and thin torso is naked" (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.86). Unlike most of the Indian historians who credit Gandhi for single handedly ousting the British from India, in the *Ice-Candy-Man* Sidhwa reduces him to the role of an eccentric dietician, who advises every woman to "flush"(p.87) their systems

with enemas. According to the masseur Gandhi "is a politician" and "it's his business to suit his tongue to the moment" (p.91). Similarly Nehru is a shrewd politician who inspite of all the efforts of Jinnah "will walk off with the lion's share" (p.131). Nehru, according to the Ice candy man is "a sly one ... He's got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English's wife out of his other what not ... He's the one to watch!" (p.131).

Even though Sidhwa tries to depict the atrocities committed by Hindu, Muslim, and Sikhs without partiality, being a Pakistani writer she makes it obvious that her sympathies are with the Muslim victims. Not only is the Sikhs' attack on Muslim villages in Punjab described vividly, but also it is seen through the eyes of the Muslim child Ranna, which shifts the reader's sympathy towards the Muslims. In an interview Sidhwa observes, "the Sikhs perpetrated the much greater brutality -- they wanted Punjab to be divided. A peasant is rooted in his soil. The only way to uproot him was to kill him or scare him out of his wits" (Montenegro 50-1).

Thus we see that Sidhwa not only shifts the blame of the Partition on to the Indian leaders, but also makes the reader sympathise with the Muslim victims of the Partition by accentuating the violence inflicted upon the Muslims by the Sikhs.

6.5 SIDHWA'S USE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

A major preoccupation of the postcolonial writer is language. Should the writer write in the language inherited from the imperial power or should he/she revert to the native language. An opposing stance has been taken by the two African writers Chinua Achebe (Nigeria) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Kenya) regarding language in postcolonial literature. Ngugi after writing his earlier works in English has rejected the language and now writes in his native language Gikuyu. Explaining his choice in *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi asks : "What is the difference between a politician who says that Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says that Africa cannot do without European Languages?" (p. 26). Ngugi's point is that language has been always used by the coloniser to mentally and spiritually control the colonised : "The domination of a peoples' language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised" (Ibid, 16). By continuing to write in the coloniser's language one is colonized on the cultural level, and instead of enriching one's own native language and culture one only ends up enriching the European traditions. However, writers such as Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara disagree. Achebe argues : "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings." (qtd in Ngugi 8). He best demonstrates this new English in his much acclaimed work *Things Fall Apart*.

Now let us see how Bapsi Sidhwa uses English in the *Ice-Candy-Man*. Sidhwa's view is similar to that of Chinua Achebe. In her interview with Feroza Jussawalla she states:

> My first language of speech is Gujarati, my second is Urdu, my third is English. But as far as reading and writing goes I can read and write best in English. I'm a tail-end product of the Raj. This is the case with a lot of people in India and Pakistan. They're condemned to write in English, but I don't think this is such a bad thing because English is a rich language. Naturally it is not my first language; I'm more at ease talking in Gujrati and Urdu. After moving to America I realized that all my sentences in English were punctuated with Gujrati and Urdu words. (*Interviews with Writers* p.214)

So even though Sidhwa writes in English it is a new English -- an English punctuated with words from the native language. However it is not a simple addition of words from the native language to English. While the writer translates a number of words from the native languages, several words are also left untranslated. For instance, the following words have been translated : "*pahalwan*, a wrestler" (p.27), " *choorail*, witches"(p.21), "*shabash*, well said!"(p.245), " *ghar ki murgi dal barabar*. A neighbor's beans are tastier than household chicken" (p.232), "*khut putli*, puppets" (p.222), "*Mamajee* Uncle" (p.77). What does such a translation of individual words do? Bill Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back* observe that such translation of individual words are the most obvious and most common authorial intrusion in cross-cultural texts. Juxtaposing the words in this way suggests that the meaning of a word is its referent. But the simple matching of words from the native language with its translated version in English reveals the general inadequacy of such an exercise. The moment a word from a native language is juxtaposed with its referent in English, instead of clarifying the meaning it shows the gap between the word and its referent. Bill Ashcroft et al argue that the implicit gap between the word from the native language and its referent, in fact disputes the "putative referentiality" of the words and establishes the word from the native language as a cultural sign. For instance, let us take the word "*kotha*" (p.267), which is translated in the novel as "roof" (p.267). It becomes clear in reading that the Hindi word "*kotha*" does not simply mean "roof", but is a place of prostitution. The gap between the word "*kotha* and "roof" establishes "*kotha*" as a cultural sign.

Apart from these words there are certain others used from the native language which are not translated, such as : "*sarkar*"(p.157), "*yaar*" (p.91), "*doolha*" (p.180), "*chachi*"(p.199), "*arrey bhagwan*" (p.26), "*angrez*"(p.28), "*haramzadi*" (p.45), "*haramkhor*" (p.95), "*chaudhary*" (p.198). What purpose is served by not translating words of the native language? The use of untranslated words "is a clear signifier that the language which actually informs the novel is an / other language" (Ashcroft p.64). Even though the *Ice-Candy-Man* is written in English, the untranslated words remind the reader that the language of conversation of the characters is not English but Hindi, Urdu or Punjabi. The untranslated words are part of the strategy of the postcolonial writer to highlight the cultural difference.

Apart from using the strategies discussed above, Sidhwa perhaps quotes various Urdu poets in her narrative to highlight Muslim culture. In fact the novel opens with Iqbal's poem "Complaint to God"(1). At the beginning of chapter 13 the quote from Iqbal's poetry is a good example of the poet's anti-colonial subjectivity:

> The times have changed; the world has changed its mind.
> The European's mystery is erased.
> The secret of his conjuring tricks is known:
> The Frankish wizard stands and looks amazed. (*Ice-Candy-Man* p.111)

Iqbal demystifies the notion of the Whites as a superior race by exposing the secret of its "conjuring tricks." At the same time Sidhwa undercuts the British notion of civilizing the Asians when they are blamed for introducing polio and syphilis in India. Colonel Bharucha while investigating the polio ridden Lenny says: "If anyone's to blame, blame the British! There was no polio in India till they brought it here!" (Ibid, 16), and later Lenny's father points out that "there was no syphilis in India until the British came" (Ibid, 61).

6.6 LET US SUM UP

Thus, we see that Bapsi Sidhwa through the *Ice-Candy-Man* has not only been successful in questioning the British and Indian versions of the subcontinent's history but has also provided an alternate version of history based on the prevalent, dominant

Pakistani point of view. She has succinctly adapted the English language to suit her purposes. Further, she has not just provided the marginalized Parsi community with a voice but also a large number of Pakistani readers. She is justified in saying:

> I think a lot of readers in Pakistan, especially with *Ice-Candy-Man*, feel that I've given them a voice, which they did not have before. They have always been portrayed in a very unfavourable light. It's been fashionable to kick Pakistan, and it's been done again and again by various writers living in the West.:. And I feel, if there's one little thing one could do, it's to make people realize: we are not worthless because we inhabit a poor country that is seen by Western eyes as a primitive, fundamentalist country only. (Montenegro 51)

6.7 GLOSSARY

Agenda: Programme of things to be done .

Alienation: Estrangement, remoteness, separation, setting against.

Decolonizing: A term of common usage in postcolonial literature / theory dealing with the process of liberating the people from the various ideas, notions, ideologies, cultural habits, etc, imposed upon them by the colonizers in order to mentally enslave them.

Native: Local inhabitant as distinguished from immigrants/ foreign race ruling the country.

Neo-Colonialism: A form of colonialism which continues even after a country has gained independence. In this form of colonialism the ruling elite continues the same form of oppression as done by the colonial rulers in the past.

6.8 QUESTIONS

Q 1. What is postcolonial literature? Discuss the term in relation to Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man.*

Q2. Give a postcolonial reading of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* .

Q3. Discuss Bapsi Sidhwa's use of the English language in the *Ice-Candy-Man*

6.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Reading

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MAEN-119
New Literatures In English

Block

5

A House for Mr. Biswas : V.S. Naipaul

Block Introduction

UNIT 1
Naipaul and his Critics 5

UNIT 2
Mr. Biswas and the Tulsis 16

UNIT 3
Mr. Biswas and his Dream House 27

UNIT 4
Why did Mr. Biswas want a House? 38

UNIT 5
Putting *A House for Mr. Biswas* in Perspective 47

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In the previous block (block 4) you read about Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*. In this block I shall be taking up V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas.*

Through the fictional account of a man (Mr. Mohun Biswas), V.S. Naipaul throws light on some major aspects of Caribbean life and yearnings. *A House for Mr. Biswas* etches the life of Indian immigrants in the Caribbean island of Trinidad. Caribbean society emerged out of successive waves of free as well as forced migration from Europe, Africa and Asia. The cultures of these various people contributed to the formation of what we broadly refer to as Caribbean culture – and yet these varied people preserved the markers of their distinct identity. This fact is what you should have in mind when you begin reading this block.

Unit 1 will introduce you to the life and works of V.S. Naipaul so that you can understand the complex influences that shaped his thinking as a writer. The indenture system has also been explained in this unit so that you have a kind of fr umework within which you can study *A House for Mr. Biswas.*

Units 2&3 contain a chapter-wise analysis of the novel in sequential order. I have also commented upon autobiographical parallels and Naipaul's narratorial skills.

Unit 4 In this unit, certain aspects of the novel have been taken up, eg. *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a diasporic novel, or as a chronicle of the changing political and social order of the times. The use of irony and humour has also been highlighted.

In **Unit 5,** *A House for Mr. Biswas* has been compared to Naipaul's other Caribbean novels, so as to enable you to look at the ways in which Naipaul has worked and reworked the same material into the increasing complexities of his later narratives.

A word of caution here – it is very important that you read and perhaps re-read the novel along with these notes, to understand it in totality. Also, do attempt the questions at the end of each unit for self-assessment to see how well you have understood the novel.

UNIT 1 NAIPAUL AND HIS CRITICS

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 A Biographical Note
1.2 An overview of Naipaul's Fiction and Non-Fiction
1.3 The 'Girmit' people
1.4 Let Us Sum Up
1.5 Glossary
1.6 Questions
1.7 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are to provide information about the life of V.S.Naipaul so that the complex influences that shaped his thinking as a writer are understood, and to examine in detail some of his other works besides *A House for Mr. Biswas*. This would give you a further insight into the different phases of his creativity. Finally it is also my endeavour to provide an overview of the indenture or 'girmit' system, which will serve as a backdrop against which you are to study *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

1.1 A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Sir Vidiadhar Surajpershad Naipaul (b. 1932) has been awarded almost every international literary prize except the Nobel for which he has been shortlisted many times. Despite controversial attitudes and statements, some of which he shrugs off contemptuously like his alleged support of Hindutva in a newspaper interview, he remains one of the best writers of our times. His concern with the quality of his work comes out in a recent interview-based feature published in *Indian Today Plus*. To quote: "I spend a lot of time writing in my head when I am working on a book" (p.57) Only when he is satisfied with the way the day's writing has taken shape, does he put it on the computer. The result is predictable and in Naipaul's own words, " I have never written an unconsidered sentence. I have never even put an unconsidered punctuation mark." (p.57) For him writing is a liberating experience as one of his letters, written in 1987, suggests.

> I wanted to be a writer because I wanted to be famous; because I wanted to be free... The contemplation that goes with writing, and the clarity it requires, make for calm. It is for me the equivalent of religion.
> (Naipaul Archives)

Before we get on to some of the biographical details that provide a background against which *A House for Mr Biswas* should be studied, a basic question has to be answered. Why did V.S.Naipaul decide to live and write in England? Naipaul has answered this question himself in his acceptance speech on being awarded the first David Cohen British Literature Prize in 1993 for a 'lifetime of achievement' :

> Writing is more than a matter of spirit. A book is a physical commercial object. It requires a well-organised society. If you are going to make a living

as a writer you need publishers, reviewers, bookshops, libraries, a public looking for new work : a book trade.

When I was starting in the mid 1950s, there was no other place where I could have set up as an English–language writer, and found encouragement. It is, of course, different now. So as a writer I was separated, and sometimes deeply separated, from my background – if you take Trinidad as my ancestral background.

The concluding sentence of the passage cited is significant as it provides a valuable clue to the persona of exile that Naipaul assumed at the outset of his writing career and which has since been associated with his creativity. This can be linked with his ancestry of indentured labour, his brahmanic upbringing (which he tries to subvert but which surfaces time and again in his writings) and his colonial education in Trinidad and England, all of which combined to breed an exclusivity, an impelling desire to assert and retain one's individuality. So all his writing is done in his Wiltshire cottage where he gets the silence and solitude needed for his concentrated work.

In his early writing, namely *A House for Mr Biswas* the novel under study, Naipaul draws upon his life and experiences in Trinidad, especially the relationship with his own father Seepersad Naipaul. However, he does not talk about his ancestry or his early life till much later. *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* (Andre Deutsch, 1984) is made up of two "personal" pieces, "Prologue to an Autobiography" and "The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro". Of these, the first attempts to trace the beginnings of Naipaul's literary career. To quote him : "It is an account of something less easily seized : my literary beginnings and the imaginative promptings of my many-sided background."(p.9)

"Our own past was, like our idea of India, a dream." (p.61) says Naipaul in *Finding the Centre*. This is true not only of the descendants of indentured workers in Trinidad but most of those in Mauritius, Fiji and other former colonies where they had gone towards the end of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century to work on the plantations. While the third section of this unit will be devoted to a detailed discussion of this category of immigrants, it is sufficient to say that most of them were poor and illiterate, venturing out of their village for the first time in the hope of earning a better livelihood or at times to ward off starvation or disgrace. Very few of them preserved any letters or records pertaining to their lives in India and over the years, the tenuous links snapped.

However, Naipaul has some idea of the region from where his ancestors had migrated though he does not know much about them as this remark suggests. " Of my mother's father, so important to our family and my father's childhood I knew almost nothing. My father's father had died when my father was a baby."(p.61)

Naipaul's great grandmother on his father's side, migrated to Trinidad towards the end of the nineteenth century. According to Naipaul, she was in dire circumstances.

About 1880, in the ancient town of Ayodhya in the United Provinces in India, a young girl of the Parray clan gave birth to a son. She must have been deeply disgraced, because she was willing to go alone with her baby to a far-off island to which other people of the region were going. That was how the Parray woman came to Trinidad. She intended her son to be a pundit; and in the district of Diego Martin she found a good pundit who was willing to take her son in and instruct him. (There was no hint, in the tale I heard, of sugar estates and barracks and contract labour.)

The years passed. The boy went out into the world and began to do pundit's work. He also dealt, in a small way, in the goods Hindus used in religious

> ceremonies. His mother began to look for a bride for him. . . . . It happened that three brothers of a suitable clan had made the journey from India together, and it happened that one of these brothers had seven daughters.
>
> The Parray boy married one of these daughters. They had three children , a girl and two boys. They lived in the village of Cunupia, not far from Chaguanas, in a house with a galvanized-iron roof. Quite suddenly, when the youngest child, a boy, was only two, the young Parray fell ill and died. Somehow all the gold coins he had hoarded disappeared; and the aunts and uncles thought the children and their mother be sent back to India. Arrangements were made but then at the last moment the youngest child didn't want to go. He ran away and hid in a latrine, and the ship sailed without them. (Ibid p.65-66)

The "Parray" woman who took such a bold step to ensure her son's happiness in surroundings where no one would know about the circumstance of his birth, was Naipaul's great grandmother. The young boy who did not want to go back to India was Naipaul's father Seepersad Naipaul. He was later sent to school and not made to work in the sugar cane plantation as was customary so that he might become a pundit and carry on the traditional vocation of the family.

The word "Parray" is sure to make the Indian student curious. One can safely assume that it is a derivative of "Pande", a brahmin surname quite common in that region. It is significant that Naipaul's father wanted to become a writer, though he came from a background with little education and equally little knowledge of English, in a small agricultural society where writing was considered an indulgence. Evidently there was a creative impulse which got transmitted to the son and found fulfillment. As Naipaul puts it , "The ambition to become a writer was given me by my father." (p.33) The relationship between Mr Mohun Biswas and his son Anand in the novel, which will be analyzed in later units, draws on this aspect of Naipaul's relationship with his own father.

Like Naipaul's paternal great grandmother, his mother's father had travelled out of India as an indentured immigrant at the turn of the century. He appeared to have done well as the description of the family house in Chaguanas, a little market town in the Indian area of Trinidad, indicates :

> My mother's family house in Chaguanas was a well-known local 'big house'. It was built in the North Indian style. It had balustraded roof terraces, and the main terrace was decorated at either end with a statue of a rampant lion. (Naipaul, *Finding the Centre*, 35)

Though Naipaul says, "I didn't like or dislike living there; it was all I knew"(*Finding the Centre*, 35) it is clear that the house provided a kind of security that Naipaul's father with his poor agricultural labour background and inability to find a stable job, could not offer independently. When Naipaul was born, his father was the *Guardian* staff correspondent in Chaguanas, a job he quit two years or so later. After that he picked up odd jobs here and there, sometimes for his wife's family, sometimes for an uncle by marriage,"a rich man, founder and part owner of the biggest bus company in the island."(*Finding the Centre*, p. 34)

Naipaul realized as an adult what he might have sensed as a child that his father "dangled all his life in a half-dependence and half-esteem between these two powerful families" (*Finding the Centre*, p. 34). This has been fictionally represented in *A House for Mr Biswas*.

It took Naipaul a long time to be able to talk about his childhood. He could do it only in 1984 when he was an established writer himself, having got over the financial as

well as emotional insecurities of his early years. Even then he chooses to blur the temporal sequence of events in his childhood. To quote him:

> Disorder within, disorder without. Only my school life was ordered; anything that had happened there I could date at once. But my family life--my life at home, in the street--was jumbled, without sequence. The sequence I have given it here has come to me only with the writing of this piece. (*Finding the Centre*, p.41)

In 1950 Naipaul won a Trinidad Government Scholarship. The basic purpose of such scholarships which could last for seven years was to help with the student's education till he had a profession. Naipaul's scholarship enabled his study in English at Oxford, not because he wanted to be an academic but because he thought it would help him to get away from Trinidad and become a writer in England. He imagined that in his three or four scholarship years at Oxford, his talents would be recognized and "....the books would start writing themselves." (Ibid p. 46)

That was not the way it worked out. In England Naipaul realized that he had no understanding of societies other than his own in Trinidad, and his life and reading in England did not provide him with material for a book. In 1955, five years after leaving Trinidad , he realized while working for the BBC as a freelance that the material for his writing had to be gleaned from his own experiences. He generalizes, "To become a writer, that noble thing , I had thought it necessary to leave. Actually to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of my self-knowledge." (*Finding the Centre*, p. 47)

So, after two failed attempts, Naipaul sat at the typewriter in the room in the Langham Hotel, sifting his Caribbean or more specially Port of Spain memories, settling finally on the image of Bogart whose father had travelled together with Naipaul's maternal grandfather as an indentured immigrant on the same ship. Some time during the long and frightening voyage they had sworn a bond of brotherhood which was honoured by their descendants.

The story of Bogart was highly appreciated by Naipaul's three colleagues in the freelancers' room , an Englishman named John Stockbridge, a Jamaican named Andrew Salkey who also wanted to be a writer and Gordon Woolford from British Guiana. This story, later included in *Miguel Street*, Naipaul's first work (though not the first to be published), led to many others. As Naipaul puts it :

> Over the next few days the street grew. Its complexities didn't need to be pointed; they simply became apparent. People who had only been names in one story got dialogue in the next, then became personalities; and old personalities became more familiar. Memory provided the material city folklore as well, and city songs... My narrator consumed material and he seemed to be able to process every kind of material.(*Finding the Centre*, p.28-9)

Naipaul finished writing the story in five or six weeks but found no takers. He went on to write a second work, a novel titled *The Mystic Masseur* which was the first to be published. He was still very anxious and insecure but did not let these feelings blur his ambitions.

In the next section I will discuss briefly Naipaul's works of fiction and non-fiction, other than those to be taken up in detail in conjunction with the novel under study, so as to give you a comperhensive idea about the different phases in his creativity. This would help you to place *A House for Mr Biswas* in the right perspective.

1.2 AN OVERVIEW OF NAIPAUL'S FICTION AND NON-FICTION

In a literary career spanning a little over three decades, Naipaul has written twenty three books. In chronological order they are *The Mystic Masseur*(1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira*(1958), *Miguel Street*(1959), *A House for Mr Biswas*(1961), *The Middle Passage*(1962) *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*(1963), *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *A Flag on the Island*(1967), *The Mimic Men* (1967), *The Loss of El Dorado*(1969), *In A Free State*(1971), *The Overcrowded Barracoon*(1972), *Guerrillas*(1975), *India: A Wounded Civilization*(1977), *A Bend in the River*(1979), *The Return of Eva Peron with the Killings in Trinidad*(1980), *Among the Believers*(1981), *Finding the Centre*(1984), *The Enigma of Arrival*(1987), *A Turn in the South*(1989), *India: A Million Mutinies Now*(1990), *A Way in the World*(1994), and *Beyond Belief* (1998).

A detailed study of *A House for Mr Biswas* should be preceded by a brief look at some of his other works in order to put him in perspective and in tracing some of the different phases in his creativity. This would include a look at his early works, namely those three which preceded *A House for Mr Biswas*. Naipaul's complex relationship with India started with initial sharp first impressions which have mellowed over the years. Therefore it is necessary to know something about his three books on India in order to comprehend *A House for Mr Biswas* better. A brief look at his two books based in England (*Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* and *The Enigma of Arrival*) and his latest book, is in order for a comprehensive outlook on Naipaul. Taken together this would provide a useful backdrop to one's reading of *A House For Mr Biswas*.

Caribbean history records a long period of colonization. Whether the colonial masters were British, French or Dutch did not really make a difference to the subject people. What mattered was its total impact which intensified over the years. In the words of a critic, "The history of the region . . . . .carries the burden of a profound erasure, the traces of which haunt the area with a memory but no recognition of an autochthonous cultural base. What remains startling about Caribbean history . . . .is the stark transparency of its European manufacture: of its populations, social structures, political organizations, and the outside orchestration of the region's participation in the events of the larger world."(Mustafa, 30)

Naipaul's early novels should be considered against the backdrop of this multiple colonialism. The choice of the East Indian Trinidadian community into which he was born and was familiar with, is natural. (This community consisted largely of indentured immigrants working as agricultural labour, who were relative newcomers in Trinidad. Also they carried with them their experiences and mainly insular outlook from the remote villages in British India from where they had been recruited. They clung to their cultural roots that often manifested themselves in rituals and traditions as a form of security which the new environs did not offer them.) Over a period of time Tridnidad's Indian community like any diaspora, "developed idiosyncrasies and cultural changes in their efforts to maintain their customs and traditions....The adherence to categories of caste, and their kinship patterns all transmuted to the colonial setting of Trinidad's already stratified society....eventually their insularity only deepened their rigidity to custom as it had been practised in India at the time of their initial emigration."(Mustafa, 31-32)

While *The Mystic Masseur* is Naipaul's first published work, and *The Suffrage of Elvira* his second novel to be published, *Miguel Street* with its seventeen episodic sketches of characters and events loosely held together by a young boy narrator who leaves home for study abroad, was the first to be written. This departure can be read as a symbol of transience or a continued migratory process that one finds in a number

of Naipaul's later works. Also the mode of discourse allows the narrative to fluctuate between a mature voice recollecting the impressions of childhood and the child's own vision which is much more limited. In the words of a critic :

"*Miguel Street*...lays the foundations for Naipaul's increasingly more concentrated examinations of the colonized condition. In both *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira, Miguel Street's* communal space is reworked into a more overt "national" framework, and the domesticity of its Dickensian "characters" into a sophisticated allegory of colonialism in *A House for Mr Biswas.*" (Mustafa, 44)

In *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira,* Naipaul concerns himself with his version of the political reality of Trinidad, before and after the country became independent. Naipaul's colonial perspective gave his writing a pro-white bias. He looked at post independence indigenous entrepreneurship and related activities in Trinidad in an ironical manner. Ganesh, the protagonist of *The Mystic Masseur*, is the stereotypical upwardly mobile first generation colonial entrepreneur who capitalized on the political opportunities that came his way. The recurring reference to him in *Miguel Street, The Suffrage of Elvira, A House for Mr Biswas* and certain stories in *A Flag on the Island* is an early example of Naipaul's "....intertextual unfolding whereby he is able to create an internal narrative authority premised upon recognition and familiarity."(Mustafa, 45)

The Suffrage of Elvira continues the political themes dealt with in *The Mystic Masseur*. It is the story of the election campaign in one district called Elvira by the candidate called Surujput Harbans. Both novels satirize a national political process after making the reader aware of a long tradition of political brokering and polarization characteristic of Trinidad's ethnic and class divisions. This has been challenged by George Lamming who denounces Naipaul's position as wholly Eurocentric. To quote him, "When such a writer is colonial, ashamed of his colonial background and striving like mad to prove himself through promotion to the peaks of a 'superior' culture whose values are gravely in doubt, then satire , like the charge of philistinism, is for me nothing more than a refuge."(Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, cited by Mustafa, 56-57). We will discuss these three books in greater detail in the last section when we relate them to *A House for Mr Biswas*.

Naipaul's three books on India trace the growth of Naipaul's attitude towards India and Indians from sharp impressions and disappointments of the first visit as expressed in *An Area of Darkness* to a perception of India, in *India : A Wounded Civilization*, as a decadent civilization which needs to make a clean break with the past in order to progress, There is a gradual resignation to all that he sees in India and he attempts to interpret current situations and issues to his largely western readership in *India : A Million Mutinies Now*.

Naipaul's quest for India, a country that aroused his curiosity and which he had reconstructed in his mind from bits and pieces gleaned from racial memory and a childhood in a Brahmin household in Trinidad, started even before he first visited it in 1962. The first visit itself, ostensibly undertaken as a quest for his roots in the country of his grandparent's origin, was not a happy experience. It took him some time to get used to the vast physicality of India which threatened to submerge his identity.

Later, as Naipual gave up his search for his " imaginary homeland", he became more responsive to the India that he visited in the seventies and eighties. He realized that while India was not and could not be his home, he could not reject it or visit the country as a casual tourist. The complexity of this relationship is suggested in a comment he makes in *India : A Wounded Civilization*: "I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far" (p.8-9). This spirit of acceptance can be related with the absence of anxiety, which indicates a shift from the outsider, colonial position he had taken earlier. Even the title is less negative, and Naipaul attempts to

transcend his itinerary and understand some of the issues and problems confronting India in the seventies.

This process is continued in *India : A Millon Mutinies Now*. The deliberate colonial slant of the title can be simplistically interpreted as an indicator of the colonial bias in Naipul's writing. It would be wiser to read it as the author's hint at the imperialistic attitude of a central government viewed as a neocolonial power, suppressing assertions of identity by the numerous socioethnic / religious/ political groups in India which had till then been marginalized. Economic progress and political clout have combined to strengthen them, giving them a voice which they raise in their march to the centre from the peripheries. However, the approach remains journalistic and Naipaul's attempts to study the problems of separatism in India are remembered as vignettes that stand out for their brilliant style (perfected over the years) rather than insightful observations.

One can juxtapose Naipaul's books on India with those based in England only to find a similar sense of alienation, an attitude that located the author somewhere between the country of his origin and the country of his adoption, in a state of permanent self-imposed exile. This could be linked up with the fact that *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion,* Naipaul's first "English" novel, was written in Kashmir, a place that calmed his hysteric reponse to the overpowering impressions of India. Kashmir had an idyllic insularity when Naipaul first visited it in 1962. The "English" character can be read as another of Naipaul's explorations of states of alienation. As a critic puts it, "Mr Stone's Prufrockian disaffection does suggest that life in the metropole, so fantasized about by distant colonials, houses its own varieties of rootlessness and frustrations."(Mustafa, 91)

"Prologue to an Autobiography" which is one of the two narratives in *Finding the Centre* and The *Enigma of Arrival* are possibly the most autobiographical of Naipaul's writings. The former has been used to substantiate facts from Naipaul's life and his development as a writer in the first section of this unit. The latter, an autobiographical work, is based in rural England, in Wiltshire where Naipaul has a cottage to which he often retreats. The novel is an acknowledgement of the narrator's imaginary England, especially the English countryside which is much more peaceful than the Caribbean Island or India. Also, the metaphor of the journey which recurs in Naipaul's works, gains prominence. "The protagonist knows that the journey he undertakes into the Wiltshire countryside is different from all previous journeys – it is an arrival with a difference... This arrival ... is a new life because he comes here having faced the final annulment – the deaths of those he has valued... And so this stranger in a new land has arrived in many ways."(Kamra, 170-1)

Naipaul's recent book *A Way in the World* starts by reiterating what he had taken up in The *Enigma of Arrival*, namely his own experience of racial politics in Trinidad in the late 50s. Characteristically, he is not interested in exploring the socio-economic reasons behind this. Possibly, Naipaul's own uprooted Indian identity, especially the idea of Hindutva which he has been partial to and argued for , is instrumental in distancing him from black politics in the Caribbeans. At the same time exploring Caribbean history through reminiscences and historical fiction is Naipaul's way of coming to terms with his own personal history. At the same time a discriminating reader can make out that his alienation stems from personal vanity and not just from cultural difference.

It would be difficult to place the book generically. At best it is formed of complicated, discontinuous but carefully arranged narrative fragments, oscillating in time, assimilating Naipaul's own experience as well as the experiences of Sir Walter Raleigh the explorer and Francisco Miranda, the nineteenth century Venezuelan revolutionary. What makes the book stand out is Naipaul's awareness of the fact that he cannot find what he is looking for, something that gives the book a sense of disquieting ambiguity which generally characterizes diasporic writing.

Naipaul's latest book *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted People* based on five months of travel in four non-Arab Muslim countries – Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan and Malaysia--shows a similar ambivalence and fragmented perception of Islam. The basic idea developed in this book is that all non-Arab Muslims have to reject their own history and heritage and adopt the Arab heritage. As this may be a perception that disturbs the existing society and sows the seeds for fundamentalism, it has been challenged and refuted by non Arab Muslims all over the world as a distorted view.

1.3 THE 'GIRMIT' PEOPLE

Documentary evidence shows that overseas migration was rare in pre-colonial India though within the country the mobility rate among Indian villagers was fairly high. Kings often spent a large share of the state revenue on their armies which consisted of professional as well as peasant soldiers. Since no single employer could provide them full security and adequate wages, they often shifted their loyalities and hence travelled from one region to another.

While this pattern of migration has been an ongoing process from the medieval times, nineteenth century overseas migration was an offshoot of colonialism. The migration from India, mainly as unskilled labour to work on plantations in Mauritius, the Caribbeans, and Fiji, began in the 1830's. European imperialist expansion in the nineteenth century with its new industrial and commercial ventures, especially plantations, created the initial milieu for large scale migration which generated expanding demands for labour. In most cases, the colonial governments and planters, working in tandem, did not consider it economically or politically correct to recruit the indigenous people.

With progressive prohibition of African slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century, India and China became the main alternative sources of labour. This was the main "pull" factor. Also, European colonialism had created severe economic and social disturbances among the peasantries of these two countries. The officers or labour recruiters or 'arkathis' went to remote villages in the interiors of the country which were stricken by drought or famine (often artificially created, as the colonizers shipped out foodgrain from India to their own armies fighting somewhere) or during a season when those working as tenant farmers or agricultural labour were unemployed.

In other words, the offers of arkathis in most cases were not accepted because they were tempting but because they were the only way out in a difficult situation. Not much is known about the cause of emigration from Gujarat. So far as emigration from eastern and southern India is concerned, it was mainly caused by financial loss. Fragmentation of the Mughal empire and administrative reorganization that the British colonizers introduced was greatly responsible for improverishment. Often landowners became tenants at short notice and were not able to exercise their hereditary rights or fulfil their customary duties. This loss of status, and not just poverty induced many to leave the country despite traditional aversion to crossing the seas or *Kala pani*. This was the 'push' factor.

Also, the development of colonial economies created several commercial though low-level industrial opportunities at these points where the western capitalist economy interacted with the indigenous rural economy in the areas of retail trade and in the manufacture of goods needed by the increasingly cash conscious peasantry. Since native populations lacked entrepreneurs who could tap these limited but lucrative opportunities, India and China provided the risk takers.

Thus, there were two kinds of Indian and Chinese emigrants to the colonies: unskilled labourers and small–scale entrepreneurs. Among Indians the distinction between the kind of emigrants was largely (though not absolutely) region–based. The unskilled labourers came mainly from eastern Uttar Pradesh, Western Bihar, and provinces in Tamil Nadu then known as Madras. The entrepreneurs were largely from the northern district of Bombay province (now part of Maharashtra), Gujarat and Sind (now in Pakistan). As mentioned earlier this regional distinction is not absolute ; for example both unskilled labourers and chettiar entrepreneurs came from Madras. However, in countries where the two types of emigrants or their descendants coexist, the distinction between them is a characteristic of intragroup relations in the Indian community.

Three main types of emigration and settlement stand out from others, a) the *kangani* system in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)and Malaya (now Malaysia) b) indentured labour in the Caribbeans, Mauritius and Fiji and c) free emigration to East Africa. In the *kangani* system, the migrants were recruited by headmen known as *kangani*s. Each *kangani* recruited a group of men belonging mainly to his caste and kin group, and from the turn of the century migration by families became quite common. Sometimes a number of emigrant bands, each with its own leader, combined under the direction of a high-caste head *kangani*. Often, the *kangani*, a man of means, lent his followers money to travel to settle down in a plantation. He negotiated with planters on wages and work conditions and could remove members of his group to another plantation if not satisfied with either. Each group occupied makeshift barracks known as 'lines' and pooled resources to meet common expenses. Even outside the workplace the *kangani* had considerable influence over the lives of his band of workers, establishing and exercising a kind of patronage over them. Within the system there were variations but one need not go into them.

Migration to the West Indies was organized by the indenture system introduced in the nineteenth century but discontinued in 1917, when the Government of India placed an embargo on indentured emigration. Emigration to Trinidad started in 1845, to Mauritius in 1834, to Fiji in 1878, to Guyana in 1838. Most of these emigrants did not return to the countries of adoption after completing their terms of indenture, something that can be linked with the reasons that made them emigrate, which has been discussed earlier. Significantly free emigration to these countries took place simultaneously but increased considerably only after 1917.

Indenture was basically a contract by which the emigrant agreed to work for a given employer for a period of five years for a specified wage. At the end of five years, the emigrant was free to reindenture or to work elsewhere in the same colony; at the end of ten years he was entitled to a subsidized air passage. The fulfilment of the contract was governed by an Immigration Ordinance enacted in the country of destination. Prospective emigrants testified before a magistrate in India that they understood the terms of the contract. On making such a deposition they were housed in a depot in Calcutta until a ship was ready to take them to their place of work.

In order to avoid cut throat competition, the Governments of Jamaica, Trinidad, Mauritius and Fiji maintained an emigration agency jointly in Calcutta. The agency issued licenses to subagents who were paid a commission on each satisfactory recruit. These hired recruiters or arkathis went round market towns, pilgrimage centres or wherever they were likely to find people desperate to get away from their present environs. The only qualifications required were physical fitness and experience of agricultural work. Initially almost all these recruits were male, later a quota of 40 percent females for every shipload was imposed by the colonial governments. Generally emigrants volunteered as individuals, emigration by family units, or caste groups or village communities were rare.

Most indentured emigrants were unrelated to one another and found themselves among strangers during the voyage and on the plantations where they were made to work. In the absence of any real kinship or family bonds, the establishment of a bond of brotherhood known as *jahazi* or *jahazi bhai* among individuals who had befriended each other during the long voyages, was instituted. The *jahazis* often got themselves assigned to the same plantation and the same barracks, regarded each other as real brothers, and treated each other's children as close kin. Marriage between the children of *jahazi bhais* was considered incestuous . In Naipaul's *Finding the Centre* there is a mention of Bogart whose ancestors from Punjab travelled with Naipaul's grandfather on the same ship and developed the *jahazi bhai* kinship. As Naipaul weaves the various strands of his Trinidad memories into his early fiction, Bogart comes to occupy a significant position.

Life in the colonies was hard. The indentured immigrants lived an isolated and insulated life, little better than slaves. Any contact with the outside world was mediated by the plantation manager, the magistrate, the police and the immigration department. Desertion laws limited their freedom of movement. The indenture contract which the emigrants called the 'girmit', an obvious distortion of 'agreement', placed them under complete control of their employers. The manager or his deputy herded the emigrants together each morning, assigned tasks, judged performance, gave some permission to report sick, and chastised others for feigning sickness. Those found guilty of indiscipline were sent to the magistrate's courts to be punished for breach of ordinance.

On completing indenture, some immigrants stayed on at the plantations, others moved out into the rural areas. In West Indian colonies the bulk of the population was of immigrant origin. So, the society as a whole, bore the strong imprint of the plantation system, its structures deeply influenced by the institution in which almost everyone and his immediate forbears had participated. Large numbers of Indians moved into villages and towns after completing their indenture, settling on the periphery of black villages, combining subsistence farming with wage labour. Indians seldom combined to form villages on their own and wherever exclusively or predominantly Indian villages were found, it was under government sponsorship.

In these old settled overseas Indian communities there were no agencies of social control comparable to panchayats in rural India. Religion, on the other hand, was used as a means to organize and orient their lives. However, rigours of plantation life, uncertainties of an alien environment and competition from Christian missionaries, changed the form and content of religious activities. In this social set up, the brahmin pundits in Trinidad came to acquire considerable status, wealth and power in the community as compared to their counter-parts in India. Hinduism in India is a way of life whereas among the overseas Indians religion is formalized. Organizations of *yagna*, the sponsoring of *pujas* and *satsangs* were forms of religious activities which became more and more frequent. Festivals like Diwali, Id etc., were celebrated with great pomp and show and participation extended to Hindus as well as Muslims. In this ambience Tulsi Das's *Ramcharitmanas* acquired a new significance as the indentured emigrants visualized themselves banished from their familiar surroundings like Rama and undergoing great hardship. Along with this, *bhajans*, *kirtans* and readings from the *Bhagwad Gita* was part of the immigrant's socio-cultural life apart from giving them a spiritual sustenance.

In conclusion I would like to tell you briefly about yet another kind of emigration which took place along with the kinds that have been discussed. This is free emigration of traders and skilled artisans who were under no social or financial constraint to emigrate but did so to try their luck in a new country. They did not settle on the land as farmers or labourers. This emigration was not entirely unorganized as those who established themselves brought over their fellow villagers, kin and others belonging to the same caste. In that sense there is a basic similarity between free emigration and the *kangani* system. Free emigration prevailed largely

in East Africa, a desired destination to a large number of entrepreneurs from Sind and Gujarat. To an extent this kind of emigration can be compared with twentieth century emigration of entrepreneurs and professionals to the Gulf region, Europe, America and Australia as a) there are no compulsions to emigrate and b) they often sponsor their immediate family members .

A study of diasporic Indian writing needs to be accompanied by a brief discussion of the various kinds of emigration as that would help to put our study of Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* in perspective.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit I gave you a complete overview of the indenture or 'girmit' system. You will have to keep this in mind when you read the text *A House for Mr Biswas*. This will serve as a backdrop against which you will make a textual analysis.

Apart from this I also discussed some of Naipaul's other fiction and non-fiction so as to give you a comprehensive idea about the different phases in his creativity. This too will help you to place *A House for Mr Biswas* in the right perspective.

Last but not the least I provided an introductory note to Naipaul's life and works.

1.5 GLOSSARY

Temporal sequence : A sequence or chronological order based on actual time of occurrence of events.

Autochthonous : Found in the place of origin.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on V.S.Naipaul's early life in Trinidad and London, substantiating it with comments made by him in his books.

2 Write a brief note on nineteenth century migration with special reference to indentured immigrants in Trinidad.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Naipaul, V.S. – *A House for Mr Biswas*. 1961. Penguin, 1969.
Naipaul, V.S. - *Finding the Centre : Two Narratives*. Andre Deutsch, 1984.
Jain, Ravindra K. *Indian Communities Abroad : Themes and Literature*. Manohar, 1993
Mustafa, Fawzia. *V.S. Naipaul*. Cambridge University Press, 1995

UNIT 2 MR. BISWAS AND THE TULSIS

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Prologue
2.2 Pastoral
2.3 Before the Tulsis
2.4 The Tulsis
2.5 The Chase
2.6 Green Vale
2.7 A Departure
2.8 Let Us Sum Up
2.9 Glossary
2.10 Questions
2.11 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to examine *A House for Mr. Biswas* in detail. Each section of this unit and the next one, is devoted to one chapter in the novel (in sequential order) and should be read along with the text so that the references autobiographical or otherwise, are clarified and your reading of the text is insightful, enabling you to interpret the text in your own way on the basis of the referential aids provided.

The first unit with its introductory note on Naipaul and the complex influences which shaped his thinking as a writer and an overview of the indenture or 'girmit' system should serve as a backdrop against which you are to study *A House for Mr. Biswas.*

2.1 PROLOGUE

A House for Mr. Biswas starts with the death of Mr. Mohun Biswas who had been working as a journalist with the *Trinidad Sentinel* and had been sacked ten weeks before his death. The character of Mr. Biswas is obviously based on Naipaul's own father Seepersad Naipaul, a journalist with the *Trinidad Guardian.* His journalistic career tapered off before coming to an end with the departure of the managing editor of the paper, Gault MacGown, who had inspired him to be a journalist. Seepersad had never realised his ambition to become a writer.

Mr. Biswas's desire to have his own house was natural as he did not want to live with the Tulsis. Naipaul would have sensed a similar desire in his own father who remained financially and emotionally dependent on his wife's family the Capil Deos, a rich and influential family of Chaguanas, a district of Trinidad. So Mohun Biswas who "...had moved from one house of strangers to another" as a boy and felt "...he had lived nowhere but in the house of the Tulsis".(p.8) was "...struck again and again by the wonder of being in his own house". (p.8) To quote from Peter Huges's monograph on Naipaul (Routledge, 1988) "The house desired by Mr. Biswas is an object of desire created by the unhoused state of his (V.S. Naipaul's) own father, long homeless under the roof of his extended family." (p.40)

On another level the house is a trope for anchorage, a common feature of diasporic writing, to be juxtaposed with the idea of homelessness that was deeply embedded in the psyche of emigrants, more so as the process of crossing the *kala pani* and settling down in an alien land was far from enjoyable or even voluntary. In Naipaul's case the emigration from Trinidad to London makes him doubly dispossessed in a way and the image of the homeless wanderer has been projected through most of his writings.

Ironically, the house which had seemed a fine one to Mr. Biswas when he had first seen it, appeared full of flaws as soon as it was bought. The staircase was dangerous, there was no back door, one door could not be opened. However, the disappointment appeared to fade in no time as Mr. Biswas and his family "... accommodated themselves to every peculiarity and awkwardness of the house" (p.12) regarding it as simply their own house. On a macro level the same holds true of the process of emigration and settling down in one's country of adoption, where everything appeared uncomfortable and bleak till the emigrants got used to their new surroundings.

Naipaul tells the reader that Mr. Biswas had built two houses of his own and spent a lot of time looking at houses. His idea of a good house was a brightly painted modern looking concrete structure, something that he assumed would be beyond his budget. So, when he saw something that broadly tallied with his expectations, he was enchanted with it and bought it without weighing the pros and cons. Naipaul's detailed description of the house is possibly assembled from childhood memories of houses he had lived in, apart from the "big house" belonging to his mother's family in Chaguanas.

While reading the text you would notice Naipaul's eye for detail and the irony that the description of the house is laced with. A couple of passages are cited from the text as illustrations :

> Because the house faced west and had no protection from the sun, in the afternoon only two rooms were comfortably habitable : the kitchen downstairs and the wet bathroom-and-lavatory upstairs.
>
> In his original design the solicitor's clerk seemed to have forgotten the need for a staircase to link both floors, and what he had provided had the appearance of an afterthought.(p.9)

These narratorial skills, displayed early in Naipaul's writing, have been perfected over the years. In "A Reporter at Large : After the Revolution" an article written for *The New Yorker,* Naipaul who visited Iran for the second time after the Islamic Revolution (the earlier visit had been in 1974), in 1997, a week before the election says :

> I was staying this time at the Hyatt. It wasn't absolutely the Hyatt now : it was the Azadi Grand Hotel... All the five-star hotels of Iran had been taken over by the state and renamed... The polished marble floor of the big lobby was reassuring... But the piece of carpet in the lift was dirty and stained and didn't fit. The gilt of the lift floors.... had been torn or worn away in places.... The hotel porters were all in open-necked shirts; this was one of the badges of Revolution... Many of the porters were unshaven: this was Islamic. Some were shiny-faced and dirty. This was social defiance: the two styles of revolution, the religious and the political, running together. (p.45)

His writing is full of such passages, each word loaded and conveying layers of meaning. The latter passage shows how, over the last few decades he has perfected his style.

In the "Prologue to an Autobiography" Naipaul refers to a heavy bookcase-and-desk made from pine and packing crates, part of his father's furniture which he could relate to and slowly take a liking to. In the novel the bookcase becomes the slumberking bed which had become as useless to Mr. Biswas as the glass cabinet bought to please his wife Shama. Starting with Mr. Biswas on his deathbed, Naipaul goes back to his early life, a *bildungsroman* in reverse, setting a literary trend of sorts.

2.2 PASTORAL

Even before one starts reading the first chapter, one is intrigued by the title. A reading of the chapter confirms what had occurred to one earlier – the use of the word "pastoral" is ironical as the ambience is anything but that. Mr. Biswas's parents are literary creations based on what Naipaul had heard of his father's parents. To quote from the "Prologue to an Autobiography" in support of my statement:

> My father's father had died when my father was a baby. My father knew only his mother's stories of this man : a miserly and cruel man who counted every biscuit in the tin, made her walk five miles in the hot sun to save a penny fare, and, days before my father was born, drove her out of the house. My father never forgave his father.(p.61)

It appears from a reading of the text that Naipaul's father transmitted a dislike of his own father to his son. This is evident when one looks at the similarity between two passages, the first from the opening paragraph of a story titled "They Named Him Mohun" from a collection of Seepersad Naipaul's stories titled *The Adventure of Gurudeva,* the second from *A House for Mr. Biswas.* To quote :

> Mohun's coming into this world of light was not an occasion of joy for anyone. There were reasons. In the first place, three months before his birth, Bipti, his mother, had left his father's home, as it turned out, never to return. With her two children – Sohani, aged four, and Krishna, a little over two years old – she had trudged seven miles to her mother's on a hot and dusty day. (*The Adventures... p.125*)

> Shortly before he was born there had been another quarrel between Mr. Biswas's mother Bipti and his father Raghu, and Bipti had taken her three children and walked all the way in the hot sun to the village where her mother Bissoondaye lived. (*A House for Mr. Biswas. 15*)

Mr. Biswas's father Raghu was mainly concerned with hoarding money, not caring if his family was deprived of necessities in the bargain. Since no one, not even his wife Bipti knew where he had hidden his hoard, no one benefitted from it when he died.

If you read the passage describing his death you would notice that there is no real sense of loss or grief, instead there is an urge to finish the rituals as quickly and correctly as possible and get down to sorting out the inconveniences caused by Raghu's death. In fact Raghu's death comes across, not as a tragic incident but an inconveniencing one which needed to be tackled efficiently, almost professionally. So, Tara, Bipti's sister, a woman of considerable means and social standing, received a message from her sister and arrived promptly. The author's comment, "She left the mourning to Bipti and arranged everything else." (p.32) leaves one in no doubt as to what was more important, the "mourning" or "everything else" which refers to the arrangements for the funeral. That this includes a pundit and a photographer, suggests a blending of the traditional with the modern, the sort of life the upwardly mobile descendants of indentured immigrants led.

Tara belongs to this class by virtue of marriage to a man who had "freed himself from land", a phrase clearly indicating that post-indenture farming was not a free choice but a compulsion in the absence of better options. Indenture can thus be interpreted as, not just a period of five or ten years during which the immigrants had to work on plantations but the life that followed, mainly that of doing odd jobs or small time farming, both barely sufficient to provide the necessities of life.

You should note the strict adherence to rituals which are most obvious during ceremonies connected with birth, death and marriage, as these gave the Indians in Trinidad a senses of security and affinity to the mother country though some of them had never seen it. The rituals were many : such as proclaiming Bipti a widow, unsalted, unseasoned food cooked in someone else's house as there could be no cooking in the house where someone had died. Tara saw to it that all these customs were observed, even "instructing" her sister's children how to behave during the ceremonies. The sombreness of the description is broken by the fact that there was no real grief and Tara the self-proclaimed master of ceremonies had come wearing all her jewellery as if she had come to attend a family wedding and not a funeral.

There were compromises in view of the law of the land. Since cremation was forbidden, there was a burial which shortened the period of mourning considerably. After all customs had to be oriented according to one's circumstances. To survive in an alien land, often in adverse conditions, called for flexibility and a functional attitude to life often dispensing with traditions that could not be carried on. Predictably, Raghu's daughter Dehuti was less concerned with her father's death and more with her future prospects in living with her childless aunt Tara who would give her new clothes, jewellery and in all possibility, arrange a good match and a sizable dowry.

Of late, creative writing in English has been flooded with linguistic experiments, mainly to give a story/novel/play/poem a regional flavour, especially when it is based in a locale that is not an English speaking area. When Naipaul was writing *A House for Mr. Biswas* such experimenting with English was practically non-existent. Keeping this in mind, his handling of English as a language spoken by people who speak in Hindi, is deft. Tara's command to the photographer in English, "All right. Draw your photo now". (p34) a literal translation of *"Theek hai. Ab photo kheench lo,"* conveys the ethos of a people who think in Hindi but speak in English if the situation demands it. The literal translation does not seem gimmicky, it hints at the dualities of language that the indentured emigrants had accepted as a part of their lives.

2.3 BEFORE THE TULSIS

After his father's death Mr. Biswas lost his moorings as his mother Bipti sold the hut and land and moved to Pagotes where they became dependants of Tara though they did not live with her. Mr. Biswas went to the Canadian Mission School where the contemptuous behaviour of his teacher Lal who had "...converted to Presbyterianism from a low Hindu caste"(p.42) towards Hindus, specially Brahmins like Mr. Biswas, suggests that caste-based communal feelings carried from India, very often determined patterns of behaviour. Lal did not lose a chance to poke fun at Mr. Biswas for not possessing a birth certificate. That he pronounces it as "buth suttificate" heightens the irony of the situation.

Another instance of similar behaviour is noticed in the attitude of F.Z. Ghany "solicitor, conveyancer and a commissioner of oaths"(p.42) to whom Tara takes Bipti and Mr. Biswas for the birth certificate. In case the reader has missed the "good humoured scorn" in the way Ghany greeted the trio, the authorial voice reaffirms it as

one is told, "He made his money from Hindus, but, as a Muslim, distrusted them."(p.43)

Conditions of abject poverty in Pagotes are conveyed through subtle touches. The school teacher never changed his jacket, he possibly had only one; most of his students dressed in hand-me-downs, at times their garments were originally meant for women. One can safely deduce that Naipaul wrote from personal experience. His father came from a family of agricultural labourers. Like Mr. Biswas, he had lost his father as a child and was nearly sent back to India with his mother and brother on an immigrant ship. Naipaul refers to the incident in *Finding the Centre.* To quote :

> The family had been `passed' for repatriation; they had gone to the immigration depot on Nelson Island. There my father had panicked, had decided that he didn't want to go back to India. He hid in one of the latrines overhanging the sea, and he stayed there until his mother changed her mind about the trip back to India. (p.62)

Though he does not talk about it; Naipaul himself would have had a hard time during his childhood, dependant on his mother's family and living with them with his mother and four brothers and sisters. After his father left the *Trinidad Guardian,* he did not have a fixed source of income to look after his family, apart from the odd job he did here and there. This bred in him a sense of insecurity and abhorrence of poverty. While the first is covered by an arrogance, the way in which he distanced himself from his father's relations in India as recounted in *An Area of Darkness* (which will be taken up in detail later) definitely suggests the latter.

In an essay titled "London" which was first published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1958 and later included in *The Overcrowded Barracoon,* Naipaul articulates his strong feelings for Trinidad:

> Trinidad may seem complex, but to anyone who knows it, it is a simple colonial philistine society. Education is desirable because it may lead to security, but any unnecessary acquaintance with books is frowned upon. (p.9)

This is reflected in his description of the education that Mr. Biswas received at school, making "copious" notes dictated by the teacher which had no meaning for him.

Naipaul's colonial conditioning and education prevented him from perceiving that the "philistine" character of Trinidad's society was not indigenous, it was a product of the colonizer's conscious efforts to strip the colonized people of their history, their cultural heritage in the name of improving them. In this context, the purpose of education was to make the student ashamed of his/her own history/heritage and adopt western ones. In the colonial context, it was dangerous to let the colonized develop a sense of pride or even a sense of curiosity about one's heritage as that might give rise to nationalist feelings. Also, in the stratified society of Trinidad, privileged ones like Tara's husband Ajodha might not be able to read but they could get others like Mr. Biswas dependent on them, to read to them. Education thus had a functional role to play.

Mr. Biswas's training with Pundit Jairam appears to be based on Naipaul's father's experience. While reading it you would notice a mechanical, ritualistic approach to religion without a trace of spirituality. A reference to the *Ramayana* along with its Hindi commentary reaffirms the statement made earlier about its special place in the psyche of the indentured emigrants who believed themselves to be exiled from their mother country. They identified with the image of Rama.

Even today in countries like Fiji and Mauritius, public readings from the *Ramayana* are common, something that is a dying tradition in rural India, especially in the face

of the TV serial or the epic. There is a reference in this chapter to another tradition that is still common in parts of rural India, that of putting one's palm-prints on the walls of one's house, not so much as a decoration as the novel suggests but as a post-marriage/post-festival ritual.

The chapter highlights Mr. Biswas's inability to train as a pundit not because of any special shortcoming but because, as the narrator suggests, the system is hollow and uninspiring. It ends with a mention of Mr. Biswas's meeting with Shama at Hanuman House. Another autobiographical parallel that you will notice in this chapter is the effect of the pundit's training and the harsh attitude of Pundit Jairam towards Mr. Biswas, resulting in stomach trouble that caused him acute pain when he was excited, depressed or angry. In *Finding the Centre* Naipaul talks about his father's stomach pains and depression.

2.4 THE TULSIS

The overwhelming presence of the Tulsis in the novel parallels the role played by Naipaul's mother's family in real life. The opening sentence in this chapter suggests the superior standing of the Tulsis in Arwacas as seen in the house they lived in. Surrounded by timber-and-corrugated iron buildings in dilapidated condition, Hanuman House "...stood like an alien white fortress." (p.80) assertive, defiant. The statue of "a rampant lion" on each side of the terrace as described by Naipaul in *Finding the Centre* (p.35) is replaced by "....A concrete statue of the benevolent monkey-god Hanuman" (p.80-81) in the novel drives home the traditional Sanatani identity of the inhabitants of the house who would have nothing to do with the reformist attitude of the Arya Samajists.

The debate between Sanatanis and Arya Samajists often threatened to become conflictual in early twentieth century northern India. The Sanatanis had a brahmin-oriented approach to religion and traditional customs whereas the Arya Samajists attempted to evolve a simpler approach to both by cutting down rituals. This annoyed the brahmins and made the situation conflictual. These conflicts found their ways into the psyche of the Indian Community in Trinidad. Predictably, established brahmin families like the Tulsis would have nothing to do with Arya Samaj while Mr. Biswas, like Naipaul's father, found it inspiring and the narrator sides with him. Mr. Biswas found the statues of Hindu gods in the formal drawing room of the Tulsis heavy and ugly and made fun of them, agreeing with a local social reformer called Pankaj Rai (partially because he was patronized by the Naths, rivals of the Tulsis) who considered idols an insult to human intelligence and to God and proclaimed that man's caste should be determined by his actions and not his birth. Rai's mysterious disappearance did not dampen his fervour and his place was taken by one Shivlochan who along with an idle journalist named Misir, passed impressive resolutions which would never be implemented.

Mr. Biswas's support for the Arya Samaj can be interpreted on another level. It is a manifestation of his resentment against the Tulsis who were avowed Sanatanis. He did not like the way he was sucked into the household by marrying Shama. To quote from the novel, "The world was too small, the Tulsi family too large. He felt trapped." (p.91) His initial euphoria at being married to a daughter of the Tulsis disappeared when he realized that he had been chosen simply because he belonged to the right caste, like Govind the illiterate coconut seller. He had neither money nor position to be able to afford a separate establishment with Shama, so he was expected to become one of the Tulsis, a sort of *ghar-jamai,* something that he found hateful and rebelled against.

Another thing that you would note while reading this chapter is the way it details intricate operations of the extended Tulsi family, the power politics and the ways in which individual assertions of identity were nipped in the bud so as to keep the monolithic structure of the family intact. The narrator talks about complex relationships between individuals at Hanuman House, even those closely related, like sisters.

There is a touch of humour in the way petty jealousies between sisters are made to appear as close bonds of affection. (Mr. Biswas, absolutely ignorant about power politics in the family, decides to criticize Mrs. Tulsi and her sons to Govind, husband of Chinta, Shama's sister, to whom she is apparently very close. However everything is reported back to them and he has a hard time defending himself.) In keeping with the politically correct traditions of the extended family, Mr. Biswas's attempts to walk out are thwarted by Chinta since her husband is responsible for the row. Mr. Biswas slowly becomes familiar with the working of the extended family and knows he would have to tackle it from within instead of running away. Since his resistance affected the powerful hold of the Tulsis on the other dependent sons-in-law as well, he was literally ordered to move to The Chase, "a long straggling settlement of mud huts in the heart of the sugarcane area" (p.141). The next section will take up his life and travails there.

2.5 THE CHASE

Naipaul's father had tried his hand at a number of odd jobs when his son was a child. Mr. Biswas did the same. This chapter takes up his attempts to live on his own in a plantation area known as The Chase for some mysterious reason. The contrast between the colonial name of the place and the miserable conditions prevailing there, parallels the irony of Mr. Biswas's situation. His hopes and expectations from his small shop selling food items, should be juxtaposed with the reality, namely the poverty of the people living there as well as the hostility of the other shopkeepers who were determined to stall any competition.

Of course the move from Hanuman House did not really make him independent of the Tulsis. The small shop with the two rooms and a kitchen ("a derelict makeshift structure in the yard" p.142) along with space at the back that the villagers and later Mr. Biswas called "the bandon" meaning abandoned land, belonged to the Tulsis, and was an unprofitable property which they had not been able to utilize in any way at that point of time. From the detailed description of the people one can safely deduce that Naipaul had lived in a house like that as a child when his father had been variously employed.

It took time for Mr. Biswas to get used to living independently. Without the security provided by the warmth and noise that was part of the ambience of the Hanuman House he was generally afraid to face life on his own. "afraid to disturb the silence, afraid to open the door of the shop, to step into the light" (p.145), one of the early symptoms of the hysteria that was to overcome him later. As Naipaul describes the furniture in Mr. Biswas's house in the Chase, one feels that he had in mind the few pieces of furniture bought by his own father in Port of Spain. This was the first furniture he had considered his own, especially the large "canopy-less cast iron fourposter whose black enamel paint was chipped and lacklustre." (p.145)

Characteristically, it was his wife Shama who provided him with the feeling of security and stability. Earlier she had protested at leaving Hanuman House but now she was reconciled to the idea and tried her best to make the rest of her family feel at home. This is conveyed subtly by a show of confidence verging on aggression. "Her actions were assertive, wasteful and unnecessarily noisy. They filled shop and house;

While reading this chapter you would notice Shama's insistence on the house–blessing ceremony which turned to out to be a Tulsi dominated event. This along with the 'mounting' of the sticks indicates the diasporic Indian's penchant for elaborate rituals. Stick fighting has been one of the most popular martial arts in certain parts of rural India. In the absence of recreational facilities; it became a pastime and an assertion of identity among the emigrants, absorbing some of the local myths and acquiring an added aura of romance, awe and mystery.

The autobigraphical note that pervades the book can be perceived in the description of Mr. Biswas' fits of hysteria which came on while Shama went away to Hanuman House after a quarrel and stayed there for sometime before returning home. Actions like growing fingernails to an unnatural length and holding them up to people to startle them can be interpreted as a craving for attention which has not been received in the normal course. The same would hold true for applying dabs of healing creams of different colours on self-inflicted wounds on his face and standing in his shop doorway to greet people. On the whole this chapter gives you a glimpse of the kind of life which Naipaul might have led as a child as his father struggled to make ends meet, in conditions far from congenial.

2.6 GREEN VALE

The bleak note of the previous chapter titled "The Chase" is carried on to "Green Vale". The title would suggest a soothing place but the trees with half the leaves dead and the other at the top "a dead green" (p.205), indicate otherwise. Even the new leaves had nothing fresh about them, "they came into the world old, without a shine, and only grew longer before they too died." (p.206) These were the trees surrounding the barracks where the labourers working on the estate lived and Mr. Biswas as their "driver" or sub-overseer lived among them. Nature evidently offered nothing to soothe the bleakness from the lives of those who lived in the barracks.

The barracks themselves, built in a line, offered the labourers little more than a roof over their heads and were not built with a thought for any privacy or comfort. There is a lot of reference to barrack life in disaporic literature from countries like Fiji, but none of it even remotely suggests that the indentured emigrants liked living in them. Therefore it should not come to you as a surprise that the sight of them aroused in Mr. Biswas the strong desire to build his own house, "by whatever means" (p.206). Nothing could make the barrack room a `room', least of all, the furniture that Mr. Biswas had bought in the last days at the Chase.

Mr. Biswas's yearning for the outside world can be read as Naipaul's father's desire to get out of what he considered the claustrophobic life in Trinidad, a desire that he passed on to his son. Please recall that Naipaul won a Trinidad government scholarship. He decided to use it to study English at Oxford, not because he was particularly interested in the degree, but because he wanted to get away.

The indication that Mr. Biswas was absolutely dissatisfied with his work and environment is effectively conveyed by the author. His complains to Shama, "Look at me... You could look at me and say that this is my sort of work?" (p.209) His itching skin, insect bites and dried dirt on fingernails were symptomatic of physical discomfort and self-loathing. There was no alternative so he carried on, finding an escape route in incessant baths, which any psychologist will tell you, is often a desperate subconscious attempt to get out of a situation while the individual knows consciously that it is not possible. One can sense the dissatisfaction in the description

of Christmas celebrations at the Hanuman House which was "only a series of anticipations" (p.215) instead of being a festive occasion.

An incident that needs to be considered seriously in this chapter is the breaking of the doll's house by Shama. She had reduced the doll's house to a bundle of firewood. "None of its parts was whole. Its delicate joints were exposed and useless. Below the torn skin of paint... the hacked and splintered wood was white and raw." (p.219). It could be read as a betrayal, an instance of Shama siding with the Tulsis instead of with her husband, which adds to his insecurity. Also, the doll's house can be interpreted as a symbol of Mr. Biswas' dreams and aspirations which were rudely shattered when he went against the code of conduct prescribed by the Tulsis, upon whom he was dependent.

This can be related directly to his hysteria which the chapter details, dwelling on its different manifestations at different points of time. His reaction to Shama's fourth pregnancy can be cited as one such instance when his insecurity overwhelmed him. To quote, "He was falling into the void, and that terror, known only in dreams, was with him as he lay awake at nights, hearing the snores and creaks and the occasional cries of babies from the other rooms." (p.227) The chapter describes a number of such manifestations, Mr. Biswas' paranoia about his house being burnt down, his unnatural suspicion of Shama and children with whom he was unable to establish a normal relationship, his bitten down fingernails, a deep sense of depression and a constant fear of being killed. Evidently Naipaul who was close to his father, observed him during his fits of depression and recreated Mr. Biswas' paranoia and hysteria fictionally from his memories.

The chapter ends with a severe storm that all but demolishes Mr. Biswas's house and can be read as an externalization of his inner fears. He could not offer even a word of comfort as Anand screams, terrified by the havoc created by the storm. He only lies on his bed muttering ineffectively as the house almost collapses. Ultimately a person called Ramkhilawan (note the name and the association that goes with it), a labourer from the barracks, comes, possibly after hearing Anand's screams and closes the windows, lights the lamp and comforts Anand. Once again Mr. Biswas' attempt to build his own house and live in it, fails.

2.7 A DEPARTURE

The concluding chapter of the first part of the novel tries to round off the happenings in this section. The inevitability of Mr. Biswas's return to Hanuman House is juxtaposed with the reassuring warm treatment which gradually brings him back to normal. To some extent he is still disoriented and "...couldn't assess what had gone before or what was to come."(p.295), oscillating between the comforting warmth of his present situation and the sharp disturbing memories of what had happened the previous night.

The Roman Catholic, Indian doctor, respected by the Tulsis, not for his professional capabilities but for good manners and affluence, diagnoses the problem as nerves and a certain vitamin deficiency. In keeping with the community's superstitious feelings, attempts are made to exorcize the evil spirits that had supposedly caused the mishap.

At this point you should be able to discern the paradox of Mr. Biswas' situation which is subtly conveyed. On one hand he did not belong with the people at Hanuman House like Seth and Mrs. Tulsi, as he found them rather patronizing. On the other, he felt secure only as a part of Hanuman House, "an organism that possessed a life, strength and power to comfort which was quite separate from the individuals who composed it."(p.302)

Another thing that you would notice in the description of Mr. Biswas' convalescence is a touch of tenderness in the narratorial voice, almost as if the narrator were trying to soothe his troubles away by enveloping him in a dark cocoon, almost womblike :

> "...Mr. Biswas slept and woke and slept again. The darkness, the silence, the absence of the world enveloped and comforted him. At some far-off time he had suffered great anguish... Now he had surrendered, and this surrender had brought peace."(p.299)

As a young boy Naipaul would have watched his father racked by fits of hysteria helplessly; as an adult he tries to atone for it by placing Mr. Biswas in as comfortable a situation as possible, such that enables him to sleep away his troubles.

What keeps the chapter from getting too bleak is the light touch of humour that Naipaul manages to infuse in a situation which would have become far too depressing otherwise. The comic relief is provided by Ramchand, husband of Mr. Biswas's sister Dehuti. He worked in a lunatic asylum and when he came to visit Mr. Biswas, he took it for granted that his brother-in-law was a certified lunatic and had to be treated accordingly. So he suggested that a gramophone be provided for Mr. Biswas so that he could listen to music as the inmates at his asylum did. A well-meant suggestion takes on a farcical note because of the aside, "We does play music to them all the time."(p.300)

The author adds his bit to make Ramchand's suggestion even more absurd. To quote: "He spoke of prerequisites of the job as though the Lunatic Asylum had been organized solely for his benefit." (p.300) A discriminating reader, familiar with Naipaul's brahminic arrogance (despite professed agnosticism) would cite this as an instance of the same, as Ramchand was from a lower caste, something that the women in Hanuman House made fun of. As one of them said, "However much you wash a pig...you can't turn it into a cow." (p.301) In the closed society of Trinidad caste hierarchies were important and transgressors were not looked upon kindly, even if they had succeeded in life.

The first part of the novel ends on a positive note though there is uncertainty regarding the future. Mr. Biswas looked upon the past as "...counterfeit, a series of cheating accidents." (p.305) and was determined to start life afresh, on his own, away from Hanuman House. As he set out with his small brown cardboard suitcase, he experienced no "spasms of terror" (p.305) as in the past, the "...knots of fear were still in his stomach, but they were so subdued he knew he could ignore them."(p.305). His nails were unbitten and whole. Mr. Biswas's resilience can be read as a wish fulfillment on a fictional level, something that Naipaul would have liked to see in his father in real life.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit the first part of the novel has been analysed section by section. Certain autobiographical parallels have also been pointed out. Naipaul's narratorial skills have been commented upon and Mr. Biswas' relationship with the Tulsis has been focused upon.

2.9 GLOSSARY

Trope : Metaphor

Bildungsroman : A novel concerning the early emotional or spiritual development or education of its protagonist. Famous

examples are Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*(1774); Dicken's *David Copperfield* (1849-50) and Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*

Pastoral : Related to shepherds or the kind of peaceful rural life that they lead. Often treated with irony, for the most part pastoral tends to be an idealization of shepherd life, and creates an image of a peaceful and uncorrupted existence.

Duality of language : The double role played by a language. In this context the knowledge of English suggests power as used by the speaker to assert herself. At the same time the regional flavour suggests a lack of education.

Colonial conditioninig : An upbringing that instils abiding faith in the colonial set up and the ideology that supports it.

Monolithic structure : An architectural term meaning a structure held up with the support of a single pillar. In this context it refers to a joint family controlled by a single person who is head.

Paranoia : Intense and irrational fear or suspicion.

Comic relief : According to western literary tradition a continuously sad situation needs a comic respite. Otherwise the reader's response is affected.

2.10 QUESTIONS

1. Mr. Mohun Biswas is a character based on V.S. Naipaul's own father. Substantiate with reference to *A House for Mr. Biswas* and other texts that have been cited in this unit.
2. Discuss the significance of the title, highlighting the way the house is used as a trope to indicate certain situations or states of mind.
3. Irony and humour add a lightness of touch to a situation which would otherwise have become very bleak and depressing. Elaborate with instances from the first part of *A House for Mr. Biswas*

2.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Naipaul, V.S. *The Overcrowded Barracoon.* 1972. Penguin. "A Reporter at Large : After the Revolution" *The New Yorker,* May 26, 1997. P45-69

Hammer, Robert D. Ed. *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul.* Heinemann, 1979.

UNIT 3 MR. BISWAS AND HIS DREAM HOUSE

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 'Amazing Scenes'
3.2 The New Regime
3.3 The Shorthills Adventure
3.4 Among the Readers and Learners
3.5 The Void
3.6 The Revolution
3.7 Coming Home
3.8 The Epilogue
3.9 Let Us Sum Up
3.10 Glossary
3.11 Questions
3.12 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit we analyzed the first part of the novel, noted certain autobiographical parallels and commented on Naipaul's narratorial skill. In this unit we shall examine the second part of the novel, chapter by chapter. You are advised to read the text along with these notes so as to comprehend the fine nuances of the novel. Farrukh Dhondy, the well known novelist and playwright based in UK who is associated with BBC channel IV, is making a telefilm based on the novel. If you manage to see the film, the visual impact will add to your appreciation of the novel.

3.1 'AMAZING SCENES'

The first part of the novel ended with Mr Biswas leaving the Hanuman House, determined to find his way in the world and make a living for himself and his family, so as not to be dependent on his in-laws. He had not decided where to go but his unbitten nails and the absence of spasms in his stomach, suggest that the uncertainty about the future did not make him nervous.

The question that you would naturally ask, at this point is , why did Mr Biswas choose to visit Dehuti and Ramchand rather than his brothers or Ajodha and Tara? Before answering this question you must remind yourself exactly why he left Hanuman House. Once you do that, finding an answer to that question becomes easier. It was no use visiting his brothers; they worked on plantations as labourers and would not be able to help him to find work in keeping with his aspirations. Ajodha and Tara did have money and position but their unhelpful attitude on an earlier occasion had been evident. Mr. Biswas had visited them intending to borrow money to build a house for himself but had came away without voicing the request.

Ramchand was a successful man in Mr. Biswas' opinion; he had risen from humble beginnings, had a regular job and had defied social norms to marry a brahmin girl though he came from the lowest social strata. Though Mr Biswas did not say

anything directly, one can safely deduce that such considerations guided the choice of Ramchand. When he actually turned up at Dehuti's place, the squalor of the imagined comforts surprised him, and he stayed on because there was nowhere else to go. Predicatably, the symptoms of his hysteria came back, the spasms, the bitten nails, an external manifestations of his frustration at not being able to find work.

Finally, he got a job with the *Trindad Sentinel*, first on a trial and then on a regular basis , at a salary of fifteen dollars a fortnight. Naipaul has based Mr Biswas' journalistic forays on his own father's experiences as a reporter of the *Trinidad Guardian*. For instance in *Finding the Centre*, he refers to the time when for some reason his father had to spend the night on a tree, something that is fictionally recreated in the novel. In *Finding the Centre* Naipaul questions his father's account. He says, "My father had his own adventures. Once, on a rainy night and far from home, his motorcycle skidded off the road and for some reason he had to spend the night up a tree ... I understood that the story was exaggerted," (p.38) The situation is reconstructed more meaningfully in the novel. The friendly editor of the *Trinidad Sentinel*, Mr Burnett whose help launched Mr Biswas' journalistic career, is based on Mr. MacGowan, the editor of *Trinidad Guardian*, whose guidance turned Seepersad Naipaul into a good journalist. You should read "Prologue to an Autobiography" for Naipaul's account, albeit sketchy, of the father's years as a journalist.

Now that he had a steady job, Mr Biswas acquired a status in his family which he did not enjoy earlier. The children at the Hanuman House gave him a magnificent reception when he went there, clamouring for the *Sentinel* dollar tokens which might get them a prize. Shama's new found respect for him, particularly his position, can be discerned in her admonishment to the children as they clambered on to his lap. " Anand you will get your father's suit dirty." (p.329) You should read this section of the chapter along with chapters in the first part in which Shama had adopted a martyred attitude or openly expressed her exasperation at his inability to establish himself financially. This chapter also records the start of a relationship, at times verging on awkwardness, between Mr Biswas and his son Anand. When one reads this along with Naipaul's references to his father in "Prologue to an Autobiography" one feels that he would have liked the relationship with his father to have developed similarly.

You should note the semi-festive occasion, almost like a family wedding that preceded Mrs Tulsi's son Owad's departure to study abroad. The women in their bright clothes and best jewellery came with their children and brought musical instruments with them, which they played till late at night. You can read this as a conscious attempt to blot the racial memory of the sombreness and apprehension and tears which would have preceded occasions when their ancestors sailed out of India in very different circumstances. Since the chapter ends with a reference to Mr Biswas's ill health, it is possible that Naipaul drew upon his own memory of the time he left Trinidad for England. A lifting of the bleakness, a promise of better things to come, are some of the indications in this chapter.

3.2 THE NEW REGIME

Naipaul's father had worked contentedly at *Trinidad Guardian* as long as MacGowan edited it. Recollecting the rapport between the two men, Naipaul says:

... a relationship was established between the two men. And my father – at a starting salary of four dollars a week – began to do reporting. There the voice was his own, the knowledge of Trinidad Indian life was his own; and the zest – for news, for the drama of everyday life, for human oddity – the zest for looking with which MacGowan infected him became real. He developed fast. (*Finding the Centre*, p. 69-70)

MacGowan increased the circulation of the paper but ran into trouble with its management . Some of the directors who had local business interests felt that he was harming those. Naipaul recollects, "MacGowan, fresh from the depression in England, wanted to run a ' Buy British' campaign; the Chairman of the *Guardian* Directors owned a trading company which dealt in American goods." (*Finding the Centre*, p.71) To put it in a nutshell, MacGowan's priorities were journalistic and at times they clashed with the business interests of the management of the paper.

Things came to a head when MacGowan ran stories in the *Guardian* about "mad bats" that flew about in the day light and he sent cables to the *The Times* and *New York Times* about vampire bats rampant in Trinidad and responsible for paralytic rabies. The story was based on facts. A local doctor had established the link between bats and paralytic rabies and was experimenting with a vaccine for the same. His work was soon to be acknowledged in text books of tropical medicine. But some of the directors had invested in tourist ventures which suffered because of this exposure and the *Guardian* Chairman who said he had never heard of anyone in Trinidad dying from a bat bite, decided that MacGowan must go. Since MacGowan had a contractual job and could not be sacked, he was harrassed into leaving. This went on for some time and had an impact on the *Guardian* and its employees, especially those close to MacGowan like Naipaul's father. Finally MacGowan had to leave and predicatably Naipaul's father lost his job after some time.

Years later, Naipaul could talk about it objectively and say, "MacGowan left. My father stated behind. He became disturbed, fell ill, lost his job, and was idle and dependent for four years ... in his clipping book, an old estate wages ledger, I came upon his relics of his heroic and hopeful time with MacGowan." (*Finding the Centre*.p. 72)

This was two year after he had written about Bogart and the life of the street in Trinidad in his first three works and was looking for fresh material. It occurred to Natipaul that he could reconstruct the life of someone like his own father on a fictional level. This was the genesis of *A House for Mr Biswas* which took three years to write and Naipaul considered it very much his father's book.

The purpose of this digression from the novel is to establish the strong autographical parallels in this chapter which you should not miss when you read about the relationship between Mr Biswas and Mr Burnett which came to an abrupt end when Mr Burnett left Trinidad. Mr Burnett was possibly the only person whom Mr Biswas could relate to and share his thoughts and aspirations with, knowing there would be understanding and the right kind of advice. Also Mr Burnett was Mr Biswas' only link with the world outside Trinidad, a world that he longed to visit and explore but could not.

This chapter also traces the growth of a new bond between Mr Biswas and his son Anand as "each saw the other as weak and vunerable, and each felt a responsibility for the other, a responsibility which .... was disguised by exaggerated authority on the one side, exaggerated respect on the other." (*A House for Mr Biswas* p.374). Anyone familiar with Naipaul's style would deduce that it is part truth and part fiction, highlighting the closeness to his father that Naipaul was denied as an adolescent, something that was not possible because of Seepersad's nervous ailments. You should be able to make out the contempt in Naipaul's tone as he details the futility of the mechanical system of education that Anand was subjected to and which Naipaul must have been caught in, himself.

Last but not the least, the way in which Seth forcibly parks his lorries in the shed at the side of the house, uprooting the rose plants, can be read as trampling on Mr Biswas' finer feelings by Seth who stands for insensitivity and callousness that Naipaul associated with Trinidad.

3.3 THE SHORTHILLS ADVENTURE

Indentured immigrants generally dreamt of coming back to India after completing the bond period. The idea of settling down in an alien country across the *kala pani* did not appeal to them. Most of them wanted to go back to their village and lead a comfortable life now that they had some money. This posed various practical problems. The money saved was inadequate for the return passage of the entire family; links with the village had snapped, land and house had been taken over by others who were not willing to vacate. This desire to go back to India diminished with the coming generations. So, with the death of Pandit Tulsi in the novel, the chances of the family returning to India diminished. In Naipaul's own family, after his grandfather's death, his mother was almost sent back to India with her children. The plans had to be abandoned when Naipaul's father could not be found at the time of departure.

An extended family runs smoothly as long as it has an effective head to supervise everything. When the head is old or ill, generally losing a grip over the family, disintegration sets in. You would notice this in the chaotic situation in the Tulsi family with Mrs Tulsi confined to the bed. Seth, who had been her right hand man previously, was now living separately with his family, the disagreement between them having already turned to open war. Naipaul tells the reader, "The cause of the quarrel remained obscure, each side accusing the other of ingratitude and treachery." (p. 391) and you realize that the cause did not matter, it was the growing rift between the two sides which was inevitable in the given circumstances. However all this did not weaken the bond between Seth's wife and the Tulsis.

Without a manager, the Tulsi household drifted like a rudderless ship. Very skilfully Naipaul conveys the prevailing chaos and dereliction. He refers to the lack of authority in the sugarcane fields with the crop season at hand and the acute shortage of provisions. He mentions economising measures like using maize flour from the crop grown on the estate, making coconut oil instead of buying it and looking for all kinds of food substitutes, some of them desperate like Mrs Tulsi's order to the widows to experiment with cooking meals with birds' nests.

The move to the Shorthills was doomed from the beginning. Even as the grandiose plans of becoming rich quickly by dairy farming, rearing sheep etc. are unfolded you know that nothing will come out of them. One could side with Mr Biswas for making fun of such visions. Nothing that the Tulsi widows tried their hands at, worked, not even the shack which was set up to sell coca cola, cakes, oranges, and avocado pears and later rum to American soldiers. There is no evidence in Naipaul's autobiographical writings that his mother's family went through this phase of destitution, so one can safely deduce that this was imaginary, possibly Naipaul's way of getting back at his mother's family for dominating his father. He refers to his father's resentment of his in-laws in *Finding the Centre*. To quote, "My father, when I got to know him, was full of rage against his mother's family." (p. 75)

Life at Shorthills was bleak and Naipaul's description of it has traces of black humour of the kind later perfected by Salman Rushdie. Let us look at a passage describing an occasion when the car meant to transport the children to school broke down and the driver, who knew nothing about cars, enlisted their help.

> Like ants around a dead cockroach the children surrounded the car (the dark girls in their dark blue uniforms) and pushed and pulled. Sometimes they pushed for more than a mile. Sometimes they pushed the car to the top of a hill, jumped aside as it rolled down, heard it start, raced after it, the driver

> urging them to hurry, sprang inside three at a time ... Sometimes the car got into Port of Spain with one side of the bonnet up and a child on the wing, operating a pump of some sort. Sometimes the car didn't go to Port of Spain at all. This pleased the children more than the driver : he had not packed lunch.
>
> (p. 410-11)

The atmosphere at Shorthills was not particularly cordial and Mr Biswas hardly saw his own children. He noticed that there was no affection between them and Anand was ashamed of his sisters as he considered them weak. Mr Biswas decided it was time for him to move and kept his eyes open for a suitable site. You might have noted that the trope of travel recurs in Naipaul's fiction and non-fiction. In the latter he likes to project himself as the perennial wanderer without a fixed home. In *A House for Mr Biswas* moving from one house to another serves a dual purpose. On a general level it suggests the homeless status of the indentured immigrant and a yearning for a home of one's own in the literal as well as metaphorical sense. Interpreted autobiographically, it seems to have originated from Naipaul's early memories when he had to move along with his family as his father changed jobs.

Finally Mr Biswas found the site he wanted and had a house constructed. The process is described in great detail along with the furniture that he acquired for the new house. But an attempt to have a hill on fire close to their own backyard set the house on fire and once again Mr Biswas was left homeless.

In this chapter one notices that Anand is growing up. His ransacking of Shama's dressing table drawers can be compared to Naipaul's reference to the contents of the drawers of his own father's desk. One can discern a growing sense of detachment in Anand, an unwillingness to conform, traits that Naipaul often associates with himself.

3.4 AMONG THE READERS AND LEARNERS

"Among the Readers and Learner" opens with another move by Mr Biswas, this time to Port of Spain. Mrs Tulsi's house there had fallen vacant and he was offered two rooms in it. He had to share the house with the Tuttles, Govind's family and Basdai, a widow. Two items of furniture had been acquired – the Slumberking bed and Théophile's bookcase, symbols of material possessions, but Mr Biswas was still without a house of his own, and by implication, far from settled in life.

The lack of privacy, the clutter, the impermanence about their life in the house in general did not deter Shama from trying to make it a home. The glass cabinet ordered by her suggests a pathetic yearning for elegance which was doomed from the beginning. Life in this overcrowded house was far from smooth. Without Mrs Tulsi's harmonizing presence, there were squabbles and petty jealousies among the sisters. In this hostile atmosphere, Mr Biswas' indigestion started bothering him again and the children were afflicted by various nervous ailments. Mr Biswas managed to establish some rapport with his children as he spoke to them of his own childhood. He was digruntled with everything, as Naipaul's father would have been with his creativity thwarted and no appreciation or encouragement from his colleagues or family.

The chapter hints at a changing social order in which some people managed to make a lot of money while others became poorer. The means was not always honest . Govind made a lot of money driving a taxi and his son Vidiadhar said at school that his father worked for the Americans. The value system was changing and those who had recently acquired money were reluctant to reveal their methods in an attempt to appear more respectable. Mr Biswas did not join the rat race but slowly he acquired

power and status in the *Sentinel*. He became the paper's special investigator and his recommendations entitled persons to be treated as "Deserving Destitutes" to benefit from a fund set up by the *Sentinel* management. You will notice in this a record of the growing power of the English language press in a developing country. Quite evidently the written word was treated with high respect.

You should also note in this chapter a complex relationship developing between the two cousins Anand and Vidiadhar. Since Naipaul won the Trinidad government scholarship to study abroad, one can deduce that there was envy and heartburn in the family, feelings of rivalry among cousins of the same age. Anand was the more sensitive of the two and it is easy to see the young Naipaul in him, keen to succeed and get out of Trinidad. However, one need not stretch the similarities between the two; Anand is also the stereotypical second generation young immigrant who has no attachment to the country of his parents' origin or the country they migrated to under some pressure, but dreams of affluence in another country. The exhibition examination in the novel brings out the desperation of such dreams, not just among the young but their parents as well.

The mention of the death of Bipti, Mr Biswas' mother, in this chapter, brings to one's mind the death of Raghu his father, earlier in the novel. There is no personal grief, only dutiful mourning and mechanical observance of funeral rites. Note the key sentence : "He (Mr Biswas) might have been attending the funeral of a stranger ... He longed to feel grief. He was surprised only by jealousy." (p.480) One is reminded of Meursault, the protagonist of Albert Camus' *The Outsider* (1942) whose sense of alienation makes him react to his mother's death in much the same way. What hurt Mr. Biswas deeply was the disrespect shown by the doctor to Bipti's body before issuing the death certificate. One can visualize a similar scene in an Indian village or small town, sometimes even big hospitals in metropolitan cities when relatives of the dead are not assertive or affluent.

As has been said before, Mr Biswas's literary aspirations like those of Seepersad Naipaul, remained unfulfilled, something that he possibly mentioned to his son. As Mr Biswas tried to create a story from his present circumstances, Naipaul churned his Caribbean memory in his first three books of fiction, falling back on Hat and Bogart who were his neighbours in Port of Spain. The chapter marks the end of a phase in Anand's life as he joins college, something that his parents had always dreamed of.

3.5 THE VOID

As you start reading this chapter entitled "The Void" , you gradually become aware of Mr Biswas's unconsciously restrictive presence in Anand's life, not allowing him to enjoy the freedom that comes with admission in college.

The metaphor of the house with its elusive promise of security and stability continues, though Mr Biswas's conscious distancing of himself from houses ["he had grown to look upon houses as things that concerned other people" (p.494)] indicated a recognition that he could never own a house. The loss of such a personal vision took away something vital from his life. "He sank into despair as into the void which, in his imagining, had always stood for the life he had yet to live." (p.495) In short without a house or hope of acquiring one, life did not seem worth living.

His "revivification" to borrow a word from the text, came with a job as the Community Welfare Officer that gave him a high salary and fair amount of power. The mood continued as Mr Biswas went for a holiday to the seaside at Sans Souci with his family in his colleageu Miss Logie's car. He had a nice time there despite Miss Logie's condescending attitude, and the holiday acquired a dreamlike quality

when recalled later in their present congested and unfriendly environs. Mr Biswas was slowly getting to be a gentleman and had a suit made in keeping with his newly acquired status. They bought a new car, much to the chargin of the other Tulsi daughters and their families. As Naipaul describes the trip to Balandra undertaken by Mr Biswas and his family in their own car, he conveys the idea that the lanscape did not interest the family as much as the ownership of a car and the novelty of travelling in it.

Disruptive forces had become a part of Mr Biswas' life and they overtook him again when his preoccupations with new acquisitions had made him almost forget them. Owad, Mrs Tulsi's younger son was returning from England and room had to be made for him. The house had to be renovated as well. So, Mr Biswas was shunted off to a room in a tenement, a dislocation he resented and balmed Mrs Tulsi for.

The alternative accomodation with its unpainted, grey-black, rotting wooden walls and the "naked galvanized roof" without a proper ceiling was like the barracks which provided shelter to indentured immigrants when they first came to work on the plantations. To add insult to injury there was no electricity. Mr Biswas fell into confusion and dismay. 'Where would the furniture go? Where would they sleep, cook, wash ? Where would the children study ?" The answers did not matter ; there was no choice. The immigrant status of the protagonist reflects the irony of the situation. As in the case of the other houses in the novel, the room in the tenement is described in detail, emphasizing the demeaning nature of the accomodation offered. Mr Biswas had saved some money in anticipitation of a crisis but six hundred and twenty dollars would not help him buy a house.

Ultimately they were allowed to move back to the old house after the renovations were over and more importantly, Owad had come. However, Mr Biswas was given only one room for himself, his family and furniture. This action makes Mrs Tulsi the prototype of the colonizer/planter who could shift dependents when and where convenient.

Towards the end of the chapter changes in the social set up of Trinidad are hinted at. The description of the Tulsi store suggests degeneration and after talking about Seth's wildness and the punishment, Naipaul states clearly, "neither Seth nor the Tulsis were as important in Arwacas as they had been." (p.530) The Sindhis who had taken over the shop next door, were definitely not indentured immigrants. They were petty traders who might have migrated recently from India, something that is hinted at by the way they played "mournful Indian film songs" (p. 530) as if to remind themselves of the mother country. Mr Biswas had survived another move though the prospect of having his own house now seemed even more remote.

3.6 THE REVOLUTION

This chapter "The Revolution" starts with a festive mood pervading the house where Mrs Tulsi was living, in anticipation of Owad's homecoming. "It was like an old Hanuman house festival." (p.533) Naipaul tells the reader that there had been nothing like it since Owad's departure for England. One way of reading the effusive welcome is treating it as a tribute to colonial education, specially a professional one, in the former colonies. Over the years the adulation has waned but in the fifties and sixties it was at its peak. Also, to be noted is the boost that it gave to the status of the Tulsi family which had been steadily going down as other families made more money and asserted themselves like the Sindhi family next door.

To come back to Owad, his homecoming was as dramatic as anticipated. With his Robert Taylor moustache which was possibly the fashion in England at that time and partly an attempt to appear grown up, as well as his hefty appearance, Owad made his presence felt in his family. His behaviour, verging on pompousness, was in keeping with the image that he tried to project and it was evident that he was the new head of the family despite the fact that his elder brother Shekhar was living in the same town. In his new role he could afford to ignore Seth and be casual towards Mr Biswas.

As a discriminating reader, you realize very soon what a fraud Owad was and how parochial he could get. It is not clear whether he was a good doctor or not. What comes across is his boasting about eminent persons he met in England (mainly Indians) and got the better of. He specially targetted Indians from India who were abominable in every way, he felt. Apart from the humourous side of Owad's description of life in England and Indians who had gone there to study, the irony of the situation is to be noted if one takes into account Naipaul's views on Indians as expressed in *An Area of Darkness*.

In the 1930s and 40s communism was fashionable among students in English universities in the wake of the Revolution in Russia. In fact many veteran Marxists in India had first received their initiation in the west. With Owad, Marxism was clearly a fad rather than an ideal or a set of beliefs. This is evident from the way in which Naipaul describes Owad's fascination with everything Russian, starting from the achievements of the Red Army to anything connected with Russia, even a Russian name. This, juxtaposed with Mr Biswas' deliberated mockery of Russian names gives a comic tinge to the hostility expressed in their word slinging. Owad considered Mr Biswas little more than a hanger on, the latter firmly believed that, given the same opportunities, he would have achieved much more.

The inevitability of Anand's encounter with Owad strikes the reader even before it actually takes place. I am sure you feel sorry for Anand after he is humiliated by Owad. Owad is the stereotypical brown sahib who tried to project a patriotic image with standards borrowed from the west. Would you have apologized to Owad if you had been in Anand's place ? Possibly not, but times are different now and Mr Biswas' semi-dependent status makes things awkward for his son as well and Shama despite her great anguish had to make her son apologize to Owad as she realized it would be impossible for them to continue living in that house otherwise.

Mr Biswas was humiliated by Owad as well, and when he refused to compromise, Mrs Tulsi gave him notice and he had to start looking for another house. The two storeyed house on Sikkim Street that the solicitor's clerk proposed to sell him with its vines of Morning Glory seemed attractive but inaccessible, till a turn of fortune made it possible for him to think of buying it. Shama, who might have noticed the gross flaws in the construction of the house, only had a fleeting glimpse of it from their moving car and the sales deed was finalized. Mr Biswas was firmly convinced that his would be a home without the intrusive presence of the Tulsis. Of course the conviction wore off with each successive visit to the house as necessary repairs had to be undertaken before they could move in. How they settled down in the house on Sikkim Street and got used to its irregularities will be taken up in the next section.

3.7 COMING HOME

What had seemed the ideal house to Mr Biswas at night, revealed itself to be far from it as he took his family to it one afternoon. The elusive ideal house/home was not meant for the wanderer/immigrant, even after a lifetime of searching. Only

something far less, the shadow of a dream. As in the case of the other houses in the novel, this one is described in details, especially the flaws, which surfaced as they started living in it. Some were repaired but it was impossible to correct all of them and soon they decided not to talk about the flaws. Their ancestors had lived in barracks where conditions had been worse. Presumably, they could live in this defective house.

The elderly Indian next door with his solid, well-constructed house does not really serve as a contrast that might be the initial impression. He had not always lived in such a well-built house. The key sentence, "The past lay in the shed at the back of his house, in the ruinous wooden houses in the street." (p.577-8) suggests that the old Indian had risen from humble beginnings and others around them were still struggling. It implies that Mr Biswas should not have any regrets about the house, there was still a future to look forward to.

Over a period of time Mr Biswas and his family not only got used to the house on Sikkim Street but started appreciating it as relatives from the extended Tulsi family like the Tuttles visited them and approved of the house. Such approval added value to the house and ironically, "Soon it seemed to the children that they had never lived anywhere but in the tall square house in Sikkim Street." (p.581) The sentence that follows is even more ironical. To quote, "From now their lives would be ordered, their memories coherent." (p.581) This statement is contradicted by what Naipaul says about his own childhood in "Prologue to an Autobiography" ;

> Disorder within, disorder without. Only my school life was ordered; anything that had happened there I could date at once. But my family life – my life at home or my life in the house, in the street was jumbled, without sequence.
>
> (Naipaul, *Finding the Centre*, 40-1)

This is one of the instances of contradiction that you will find throughout Naipaul's work and should learn to recognize as characteristic of his style.

The chapter ends on a positive note, indicating the human capacity to adjust to adverse cirumstances and making life bearable, even happy. Slowly Mr Biswas settled down in the house on Sikkim Street, specially after he had called the solicitor's clerk all the names he wanted to and got the the bitterness out of his system . The discovery of the extra space in the deed that was twelve feet away from the fence made him feel that the deal had been worthwhile and his love for gardening was once again reawakened. The laburnum tree planted by him "... gave the house a romantic aura, softened the tall graceless lines, and provided some shelter from the afternoon sun." (p.584) This was the closest Mr Biswas could get to his dream house and he made the best of it. This was the right house for Mr Biswas. It had put an end to his wanderings and granted stability to his life. The immigrant had finally came "home".

3.8 THE EPILOGUE

The Epilogue, short when compared to the chapter preceding it, attempts to round off the happenings in the novel, tying up loose ends. You get to know what Owad and Shekhar were doing though you might just be casually interested in their affairs. You learn that after the abolition of the Social Welfare Department Mr Biswas went back to the *Sentinel*. Was that a comedown for him ? Monetarily yes, but Mr Biswas found it stimulating to work as a journalist and the only thing that depressed him was the debt of four thousand dollars that he had incurred because of the house, specially in the nights when he brooded over it, feeling that time was flying by and disaster was looming over him, "devouring his life" (p.586)

The description of his life and career makes it clear that both were on the decline, and the first heart attack came as a surprise to him though the reader had expected something of the sort.

If you are reading the book from the psychoanalytical angle, the Epilogue will provide clues about Naipaul's relationship with his own father who died when he was studying in England. One detects traces of guilt in the way Naipaul talks of Anand's cold response to his father's letters, specially Shama's letter informing him of the seriousness of Mr Biswas' illness. The difference in the ways in which Anand and Savi react to Shama's letter, emphasizes the point. To quote ;

> She wrote to Anand and Savi. Savi answered in about a fortnight. She was returning as soon as possible. Anand wrote a strange, maudlin, useless letter. (p.588)

Savi's return and her new job at a big salary made Mr Biswas' last days happy so that the novel, though it ends with Mrs Biswas' death, suggests continuity through the daughter rather than the son, a point which should be of interest to feminist critics. On the whole the women in the novel, Mrs Tulsi, Shama and Savi among others, are more resilient and stronger than the men, something possibly based on Naipaul's observations in his own family when his father did not have a job but his mother managed to run the family.

3.9 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, I gave you a chapter-wise analysis of the second part of the novel, including the Epiloque. Autobiographical parallels and contradictions were also pointed out.The chapter by chapter analysis of the text in this unit and the preceding one should not be treated as exhaustive. Read in conjuction with the novel it should trigger off your own line of thinking and help you to critique the text, something that would be helped by the broad guidelines in the next two units.

3.10 GLOSSARY

Narratorial skill: Devices used by an author to enhance the structure and content of a narrative or mode of presentation.

Racial memory: Deep rooted memory, generally of a traumatic experience, of a group of people, that is transmitted to the generations to come and finds a voice in literature/art produced by them.

3.11 QUESTIONS

1. Why did Mr Biswas choose to visit Dehuti and Ramchand rather than his brothers or Ajodha and Tara when he left Hanuman House?

2. How did he get a job with the *Trinidad Sentinel*? What difference did it make to his status in the family? How far can this be compared to Seepersad Naipaul's journalistic career ?

3. Do you think that the house on Sikkim Street is the ideal house Mr Biswas had been looking for? Give reasons for your answer.

3.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

Naipaul, V.S. The *Middle Passage*. Andre Deutsch, 1962

Gusson, Mel " The Enigma of V.S Naipaul's search for himself in writing" *New York Times*, 25 April 1987. P3, 29-30.

UNIT 4 WHY DID MR. BISWAS WANT A HOUSE?

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Diasporic Novel
4.2 Socio – political chronicle
4.3 Irony and Humour
4.4 Let Us Sum Up
4.5 Glossary
4.6 Questions
4.7 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying the conditions that provided a backdrop to Naipaul's creativity and after critiquing the text of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, you are sure to have formed your own opinion about the novel. The objective of this unit is to answer a few questions on the novel in an attempt to find out why and to what extent it is of interest to the postcolonial reader. This is done under three heads: *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a diasporic novel or diasporic allegory, the novel as a chronicle of the changing political and social order and the use of irony and humour in the novel. However this should not be taken as a comprehensive assessment of the novel but as an indication of some of the ways in which it can be approached.

4.1 DIASPORIC NOVEL

The diasporic sensibility is valuable for attempting to bridge cultures through a widening of experience. Experience might be widened but bridging cultures, especially for one who has been away from the mother country and generally not in touch with it, is almost impossible. In the process, the diasporan suffers from a sense of loss and unhappiness.

A postcolonial reconstruction of *A House for Mr. Biswas* reveals this unhappiness. Despite the statement made in the title, Mr. Biswas did not find a house in keeping with his expectations. He accepted the shortcomings of the house on Sikkim Street in his last days, to the extent that at times it gave the illusion of being the ideal house in the soothing shade of the laburnum tree. But you know that it is the quest that engaged the seeker, not the particular object that he sought.

A key text that should help your reading of diasporic history is *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* by Paul Gilroy (Harvard University Press, 1993). Gilroy juxtaposes the metaphors of "root" and "route" in his study of diasporic literature. The "root" metaphor reconstructs memorially a pristine, pure, uncontaminated homeland to which the first generation immigrant dreamt of returning. In the novel one reads about Pundit Tulsi's dream of returning to India, a dream that became meaningless after his death. In *Finding the Centre* Naipaul talks about his grandfather who died on his way back to his native village near Gorakhpur. The "route" metaphor suggests the journey and the historical interactions between

masters and indentured immigrants little better than slaves, which have forever "contaminated" the diasporic ethos and memory. Vijay Mishra in his "(B) ordering Naipaul : Indenture History and Diasporic Poetics" locates the "route" metaphor in two geograhical spaces : the ship and the plantation barracks. Of the first Mishra says:

> The ship ... is the first of the cultural units in which social relations are re-sited and renegotiated. For the old, exclusivist Indian diaspora, the ship produced a site in which caste purities were largely lost (after all the crossing of the dark ocean, the kalapani, signified the loss of caste) as well as a new form of socialization that went by the name of jahaji-bhai (ship-brotherhood). Social interactions during these lengthy sea voyages began a process that led to the remaking of cultural and ethnic identities, to a critical self-reflexivity of the kind missing from the startified and less mobile institutions of the homeland. (Mishra, 195)

For most of these immigrants who had rarely travelled out of their villages, prior to this voyage, it took time to comprehend the restrictive implications of indenture. When it did, these people, most of whom carried the *Ramcharit manas* and the *Gita* with them as talisman, the experience of indenture was likened to a long exile similar to Rama's *vanavasa*, out of which they would emerge purer than before.

In the barracks, also known as coolie lines, both because the labourers lived in them and they were lines of thirty or forty rooms constructed back to back, each family was alloted a room with no place for cooking, no bathrooms or toilets. To quote from "Tota's Tale" a poem by Satendra Nandan, a Fijian Indian poet, critic and statesman now living in Australia:

An empty line of twenty-four rooms :
Eight feet by twelve feet.
Once it housed native workers
Eight died : others fled
Who would live among the dead?
Homeless I had come in search of paradise
This house of hell was now all mine.
(Nandan, *Lines Across Black Waters*, 11-12)

It was Mr. Biswas's experience in the barracks of Green Vale that triggered off his desire to own a house. Another Fijian Indian writer Totaram Sanadhya, referred to those dark, monotonous and menacing lines/ barracks as "*bhut len*" (lines of ghosts / devils) and titled his book of poems "Bhut len ki Katha" (Saraswati Press, 1994). Thus an indentured labourer lured by promises of a life more comfortable than what he had led in his village plus a reasonably high pay, was for all practical purposes a slave, imprisoned on his master's estate with considerable limits set upon freedom. The working hours were long and arduous – twelve to sixteen hours at a stretch and wages which remained unchanged throughout the ninety years of indenture, a mere pittance, about twenty five cents per day from which over one third was deducted for rations supplied. Sharing rations was considered an offence. Possibly a racial memory of this prompted V.S. Naipaul to write:

> Growing up in Trinidad, I had never wanted to be employed. I had always wanted to be a free man. This was partly the effect of my peasant Indian background and the colonial agricultural society of Trinidad. And though it had not been easy in the beginning, I had remained a free man.
>
> (Naipaul, *A Turn in the South*, 261)

In the passage just cited, Naipaul does not mention the unequal power relations in the plantations and the politics of the desire for independence on the part of the

descendants of indentured immigrants. By essentializing this desire and presenting this as an act of pure will, people in the space of the plantation are erased and the experience becomes part of the diasporan aesthetics.

Struggle for space in barrack life was replicated in Hanuman House where no one got enough space except for Mrs. Tulsi the matriarch, her two privileged sons Shekhar and Owad and her sister's husband Seth who managed her estate. Everything had to be shared – space, lives and valuables, there was no privacy, no exclusivity. That was why the doll's house was broken up by Shama, it had been bought only for Savi, not all the children and such a thing could not be allowed within the domain of Hanuman House.

Yet it was Hanuman House, the warmth and reassurance of the Blue room in it, which healed Mr.Biswas after the traumatic experience of the stormy night. The name of Hanuman as a source of physical and spiritual strength, is often invoked when one is afraid. The analogy is clear. The indentured immigrants or 'girmitiyas' as they called themselves, considered themselves banished from their mother country for a specific period like Rama and hoped to return to it in glory like him, some day. You might find such analogizing very simplisitic but that is because your thinking and conditioning is urban, possibly secular, unlike theirs. During the long and traumatic voyage and in the alien land *Ramcharit Manas* and to an extent the *Gita* gave them the needed solace and became part of their lives. A reading of the text in this light reveals many things. Hanuman House presided over by Mrs.Tulsi with Seth's help was a tower of strength, emphasizing the significance of the trading class along with their religious beliefs; the three families to which Mr.Biswas was related by blood or marriage were called the Raghu family, the Ajodha family and the Tulsi family.

Putting the names of the family this way, an inter-text, that of Tulsi's *Ramcharit Manas*, reveals itself with certain modifications. To quote Vijay Mishra, "The real genealogy of the people...gets overlaid by an earlier memory of the vernacular epic; which is then symbolized through the inhabitants of the space of houses and barracks. Any departure from the world order so constructed, and the equal spaces occupied by most people...leads to swift revenge and spiteful action." (Mishra,218) So the house had to broken up by Shama as a ritualistic gesture to retain the prevailing order.

Debates between the Sanatanists and Arya Samajists often became open conflicts and generated a lot of bitterness among people of the old Indian diaspora wherever they had settled down. Even now in Fiji there is a clear divide between the two sects. A student from Fiji told me of her family's refusal to cremate her father in a crematorium owned by an uncle who was an Arya Samajist. Naipaul's maternal uncle Simbhoonath Capilede, one of the two "gods"in the novel, was a staunch Sanatanist and Naipaul's father, like Mr.Biswas became a member of the Arya Samaj for a brief period, possibly to defy the dominance of his wife's family. In a letter to Richard Forbes the West Indian critic who asked Naipaul about his father's pamphlet "Religion:Pandit Ayodhya Prasad and Trinidad", Naipaul wrote:

> My father did write the pamphlet and published it too. I remember it as a very slim red covered booklet in our bookcase. I believe my father said that (a certain relative) had bought the stock and destroyed it – but I do not know whether I really heard this or whether I have made this up...My father at one stage read parts of the pamphlet to me...The booklet was later lost or destroyed.
>
> (Cited by Vijay Mishra, 231)

As a self-proclaimed agnostic (another paradox, as you will find traces of Brahmanic arrogance in him)Naipaul finds it easier to empathise with Mr.Biswas's preference for the Arya Samaj. However, others who made long speeches and considered

themselves reformist leaders, exposed themselves when scrutinized. Naipaul consciously makes fun of any kind of religiosity whether it is the "heavy and ugly" statues of Hindu gods in the Tulsi drawing room or the long winded speeches made by Arya Samajists. This is a departure from the stereotypical diasporic sensibility which considers religion some sort of talisman, a link with the country of origin, to be cherished and suitable rites to be observed though often in modified form.

However, you should be wary of oversimplifying Naipaul's cultural prejudices and locating him simply in the narrative of exile and loss, for then you would miss the complex counternarrative in his writing, something that can be traced back to Naipaul's own father and the predicament in which the latter was placed circumstantially. To quote:

> My father rejecting one world, came into contact with another. In him was played out the whole tragic drama of an ancient civilization coming into contact with a hideous colonial mimicry of another civilization.
> (V.S.Naipaul, Archive 1:1.3 Cited by Vijay Mishra, 194)

Mishra rightly points out that this mimicry is " ... a forced aesthetic intervention when writing is really the pursuit of signs without any real understanding of their referents". (Mishra, 194) Mishra gives the example of daffodils from the essay 'Jasmine' in *The Overcrowded Barracoon* which is identified as a sign but its referent cannot be conceptualized. "A pretty little flower, no doubt; but we had never seen it. Could the poem have any meaning for us? " (*The Overcrowded Barracoon.* p.24) Your reading of *A House for Mr.Biswas* would reveal many such signs.

Interestingly, Naipaul never uses the word "diaspora" but it is clear from his works that the diasporic experience – that of displacement and migrancy along with a yearning for an imagined homeland which they cannot go back to gives his writing "... the rawness of nerves, the neurosis that gives his prose the special quality of panic." (Mishra, 225) This turns into a creative hysteria when confronted with the vast physicality of India. The last unit attempts a comparative study of *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a diasporic novel with strong expressions of the displaced sensibility.

4.2 SOCIO-POLITICAL CHRONICLE

A House for Mr. Biswas can be read as a chronicle of socio-political changes that swept over Trinidad in the early years of this century, giving a new direction to the second and third generation immigrants who had no plans of going back to India. Occasional trips to India in search of roots, and in case of older persons, to revive racial memory, were common. What this section of the unit proposes to do is to critique Trinidad society as depicted in the novel, as it moved towards post-coloniality, with a view to identifying the specific changes that contributed to this socio-cultural shift.

Ironically titled "Pastoral", the first chapter in Part One looks at first generation "girmitiyas" who had finished their indenture and had decided to stay on in the colonies, working as farm labourers and straining to make both ends meet. The social set up was colonial and the clerk and the overseer in the farm jointly calculating and disbursing salary were immediate representatives of the colonizer.

Mr. Biswas with his aspirations of getting a job and a house on his own was something of an anomaly in this society where power equations were gradually changing with money and success being prioritized. People such as Tara, Ajodha and Mrs. Tulsi emerged as decision makers. However, their importance dwindled even as Trinidad established contacts with the west wherein persons like Miss Logie became

synonymous with power and authority. Even Mr. Biswas gained status, first as a media person and later as the Community Welfare Officer. The respect for the written word and the power that is associated with journalism is conveyed effectively. Mr. Biswas's stint with the Community Welfare Office can be read today as a job with a well established NGO, wielding considerable power in a postcolonial society.

Mr. Biswas anticipated changes in Trinidad society. Like Seepersad Naipaul, he was contemptuous of old icons, statues of Hindu gods that Pundit Tulsi had brought home from his Indian visits. His contempt for Mrs. Tulsi's younger son who tried to dominate the household can be read as a colonizer-colonized relationship in a newly independent society where neo-colonialism often replaced the old order.

In keeping with these changes, western education gained importance. While the English medium school in Trinidad with its scruffy looking teacher and students in ragged clothes, is a caricature of western education as it was imparted in colonies for a specific purpose, it was clearly the ambition of every immigrant parent to try and send children abroad for higher studies. The situation in India in the fifties and sixties was much the same. This can be contrasted with the earlier part of the novel where no parent, except someone well off like Mrs. Tulsi could think of sending children abroad to study. Mr. Biswas had to make do with whatever rudimentary education he could avail of locally and did not cost too much only because he was supposed to train as a Pundit. His brothers had no such privilege; they worked as farm labourers. He, on the other hand, educated all his children; Savi and Anand got scholarships to study abroad. The importance attached to the scholarship examination which Anand cleared, reminds one of the zeal and hard work which young people put into their preparations for examinations/interviews, which if cleared successfully, enable them to study abroad on scholarships and get well paid jobs there. While Mr. Biswas' generation did not send daughters to study abroad, preferring to spend money on their marriage and their sons-in-law, the focus shifts with Savi getting a scholarship to study abroad even before her elder brother Anand does.

The indentured immigrant had little or no contact with the world outside his plantation. In *A House for Mr. Biswas* you will find his world enlarging as he attempted to find an identity for himself in the opportunities available outside the plantation. You will notice this in Mr. Biswas' progress through life, his struggles to get away from farming or working under the Tulsis, his achievements and failures as well as the aspirations that he passed on to his son, Anand. With each new house that Mr. Biswas moved to, his personal world gained a little more space. Correspondingly, the houses improved and the last one enhanced by the labrunum tree, seemed to resemble to some extent, the house that Mr. Biswas had always dreamt of.

Architectural changes in the houses described minutely are indicative of changes that swept over Trinidad. I will cite a few examples and you can work out the rest. The "crumbling mud hut in the swamplands"(p. 15) in which Mr. Biswas was born, belonged to his mother's father, drained of life and energy by hard work on the sugar plantation. His father Raghu lived in a similar hut.

Pundit Jairam lives in a "...bare, spacious, unpainted wooden house smelling of blue soap and incense...its cleanliness and sanctity maintained by regulation awkward to everyone except himself."(p.50). As an apprentice here Mr. Biswas lived in brahmanic exclusivity and severity. When you examine the detailed descriptions of houses in the novel, reading between the lines will help you in your attempt to trace the changes in Trinidad society as well as the evolving attitude of the characters who built or bought the house. A house was more than a home to the immigrant, it was an anchorage, to an extent it still is. I'm sure you have read in recent news-papers the extent to which Salman Rushdie went to reclaim an old house in Solan in Himachal Pradesh through law courts, an act that can be read as a successful reclamation of his Indian roots.

Why did Mr. Biswas want a House?

The house on Sikkim Street where Mr. Biswas spent the last few years of his life was different from the other houses described in the book. For one thing there was nothing about it that would remind the occupants of their indenture or Indian origin. The garden with its rose trees, anthurium lilies and breadfruit tree, indicates a desire to adapt to the new environs, borrowing from the west only to bring order in their lives ("From now their lives would be ordered, their memories coherent."p.58) The immigrant had arrived at last and there was nothing enigmatic about this arrival. Sudha Rai considers this attitude typical of expatriate sensibility. She says :"The expatriate finds that childhood connects with India, but adulthood with its burden of reality(seeing) and reason, separates...The criticism and rejection of modern India defends the painfully developed expatriate self. As a result, the two halves of the expatriate identity – reality and fantasy, can never be fitted together."(Rai,19)

You cannot discuss the changes that came into the field of trade and commerce without bringing in the change in the status of the Tulsis, "neither Seth nor the Tulsis were as important in Arwacas as they had been."(p.530) Even the store now was not wholly owned by them as this remark made by the author, suggests. "In the store the Tulsi name had been replaced by the Scottish name of a Port of Spain firm, and this name had been spoken for long so that it now fully belonged and no one was aware of any incongruity."(p.530)

The Sindhis "who had taken over the shop next door" (p.530) seemed to have migrated to the Caribbeans much later for business purposes, and had stronger links with India as the Indian songs played on their gramophone and the "strange" (to the descendants of the girmitiyas) smells of their food suggested. There does not seem to be any interaction between the two. Most immigrants who went later to these colonial outposts were semi-skilled or had business interests along with the capital to further them. Since monetary success is the yardstick by which immigrants like to judge themselves and others, there is an insurmountable barrier between those who have succeeded and those who have not.

Blacks are not mentioned in the first part of the novel. The black solicitor's clerk from whom Mr. Biswas bought the house on Sikkim Street, is deliberately referred to as a "negro" and dismissed as "...an illegal immigrant from one of the smaller islands." (p.566) Predictably he overcharged Mr. Biswas for the house though the extra space of twelve feet inside the boundary indicated in the deed, seemed a victory of sorts. Except for Brathwaite in recent years, not many Caribbean writers have projected the multicultural, multi-ethnic character of society in their writing.

The changes that one reads about in *A House for Mr. Biswas* are both sweeping and subtle. From being mainly agricultural at the beginning of the novel, society evolved into a more complex web. If you read carefully you will notice that priorities changed in the course of the novel, values became money-based and slowly individuals came into their own, shedding their group based identity. The society in which Mr. Biswas spent the last few years of his life, was definitely a fore - runner to postcolonial society in the former colonies though its postcoloniality had yet to acquire a definite shape. The women in the novel were more resilient and accepted the changes in their stride while Mr. Biswas took time to adapt to them, as a result of which his relationship with his son Anand was often conflictual. As you glance through the text and pass on to other samples of post-colonial condition, it is time to examine another aspect of the text, its use of irony and humour.

4.3 IRONY AND HUMOUR

Any discussion on the use of irony and humour in *A House for Mr. Biswas* would start with a look at the title and what it signifies. The title of the story by Seepersad Naipaul on which it is based, is "They Called Him Mohun", much more informal with a touch of closeness/intimacy, conveyed in the use of the first name.

Though Mr. Biswas was named Mohun Biswas, the author never refers to him by his first name, not even when he was a baby. This by itself is ludicrous and you read about the superstitions associated with him like his "unlucky sneeze" because he was born at the inauspicious hour of midnight (no one knew the exact time; Bissoondaye and the midwife had assumed it was midnight) and had six fingers on one hand. Ironically, he was indirectly responsible for his father's drowning and his notoriety as a harbinger of bad luck grew.

That he did not have a "buth suttificate" did not disturb Mr. Biswas unduly till he went to the Canadian Mission School and the ragged looking teacher demanded one. The way in which he acquired one is a humorous dig at the way in which the law was executed in a colonial society, it appeared absurd though the original purpose had been rational. The system of education which made a mockery of knowledge served no purpose except to train petty clerks. It had no relation to their daily lives and was therefore unconvincing. Even the teacher who taught them, did not believe in it. "The history Lal taught he regarded as simply a school subject, a discipline, as unreal as the geography." (p.46)

You must have observed that the nature of humour in the novel varies. Sometimes it borders on pathos as when describing the education system. Sometimes there is a black edge to it as in the passages describing the way in which Mr. Biswas and Shama get married. At times it is light hearted with just a trace of resentment at being patronized. Mr. Biswas' resentment at being sucked into the Tulsi household found an outlet in the absurd names that he made up for the prominent members of the family. Mrs. Tulsi was the "old hen"/ "old cow" / "old queen" and her sons the "little dogs" and Seth was "Big Boss". Predictably confronted by Seth and Mrs. Tulsi, Mr. Biswas had no way of defending himself and when pushed into a corner, lost his temper and shouted at everyone. Even a humorous situation can become awkward if not handled properly.

Quite a bit of the humour in the novel is generated by Mr. Biswas' ineffectual railing against members of his wife's family, ineffectual because he was dependant on them financially as well as emotionally, a situation that he tried to get out of but could not. One suspects that V.S. Naipaul was trying to undo the hurt of situations which held painful memory. Humour was the best literary device for gaining control over a hapless past.

While dealing with Mr. Biswas, Naipaul often uses the technique of the caricaturist, blowing a trait out of proportion till the situation acquires a comic exaggeration. While Mr. Biswas' apprehensions at the sugarcane plantation might have been justified, the precautions taken by him, were amusing. As if sleeping with a cutlass and *poui* stick (that had belonged to his father) were not enough, he kept a dog and called it Tarzan, hoping that would make it fearsome. Ironically "....Tarzan turned out to be friendly and inquisitive, and a terror only to the poultry."(p.263) His profound conversations with the dog amuse, at the same time convey the pathetic mind set of someone who could not communicate with anyone else. Even the therapeutic presence of the dog did not soothe his fears.

Mr. Biswas is not the only one in the novel to contribute to the irony and humour. Authorial comments, sometimes on the most unlikely subjects, are laced with it. Talking about the beggars who had made their home on Woodford Square and cooked, ate and slept there, Naipaul says, "They worried no one, and they all had excellent physiques, and one or two were reputed to be millionaires" (p.317). It is possible that Salman Rushdie was inspired by this when he wrote a story about the theft of the relic from the Hazrat Bal Mosque in Srinagar which was accidentally touched by a crippled beggar who had become a millionaire. Touching the relic made him whole again and his lucrative source of income was gone. Though black humour was perfected by Rushdie, there is a blackness about Naipaul's humour too.

Why did Mr. Biswas want a House?

Among other characters who amuse the reader in the novel, is Ramchand, Mr. Biswas' brother-in-law. His job in a lunatic asylum gave him a sense of security, even cockiness, to the extent he believed that the place was created for the likes of him. Also, when he came to see Mr. Biswas after the latter had a nervous breakdown, he behaved as if his brother-in-law was a certified lunatic. In terms of worldly success, Ramchand was a winner, but the question that disturbs one is, did he deserve the success that came his way ? In other words, the novelist suggests that though success was something everyone aimed at, in the colonial set up, it was not necessarily attained by the most deserving candidate.

I have drawn your attention to examples of irony and humour in the novel on a broad basis. You should read it carefully for more references. Look out for the nuances of language which capture the ethos of a people who thought in one language, spoke in another, altogether trying to grow out of their girmitiya background and occupations. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is the most humorous of Naipaul's novels and you should be able to enjoy it as such.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit I have attempted to look at the novel from three angles. There are possibly more ways of approaching *A House for Mr. Biswas.* Make your own observations, and draw your own conclusions. The vast dimensions of the novel allow different readings at socio-political and cultural / economic levels, exploring and commenting on different aspects of life led by the girmitiyas and their descendants in a society changing from colonial to post-colonial. Naipaul wrote many works of fiction and non-fiction after *A House for Mr. Biswas* but none so multi-layered or so open to different interpretations. A comparative study of the novel, in juxtaposition to the texts that came before it and in conjunction with Naipaul's books on India in the next section, would bring out aspects of the novel hitherto untouched, yet another proof of its rich textual fabric.

4.5 GLOSSARY

Postcolonial reconstruction: A reading of the text from the postcolonial viewpoint, means adding new meaning and significance to it, also reading between the lines to look for hidden meanings, deliberate omissions/inclusions overlooked earlier.

Counternarrative: A narrative that counters the main one and can be traced to autobiographical parallels or racial memory, something deeply entrenched in the writer's psyche.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. Examine *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a diasporic novel.

2. Write a note on the use of irony and humour in *A House for Mr. Biswas*.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Mishra, Vijay. "(B) ordering Naipaul : Indenture History and Diasporic Poetics", *Diaspora* 5:21, 1996 p. 196-236

UNIT 5 PUTTING *A HOUSE FOR MR BISWAS* IN PERSPECTIVE

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Naipaul's early works : *The Mystic Masseur*
5.2 *Miguel Street*
5.3 *The Suffrage of Elvira*
5.4 *Middle Passage*
5.5 Naipaul and India :*An Area of Darkness*
5.6 *India : A Million Mutinies Now*
5.7 Let Us Sum Up
5.8 Glossary
5.9 Questions
5.10 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

What more is there to know about *A House for Mr Biswas*? I can see the question forming in your minds. You have studied the background of the novel, glanced at biographical material on V.S Naipaul, read the text in an attempt to reconstruct it and looked at some critical approaches to the novel.

But, as postgraduate students you would know that you cannot study a work of fiction in isolation. Apart from the background and all that went into the making of this particular novel, you should know about other related works of the novelist so as to put the text prescribed for you in a literary context.

By implication, you would comprehend *A House for Mr Biswas* better if you compare it with Naipaul's Caribbean novels, *The Mystic Masseur*, the *The Suffrage of Elvira* and *Miguel Street* and his impression of colonial society in the West Indies in *The Middle Passage*. This would enable you to look at the ways in which Naipaul has worked and reworked the same material into the increasing complexities of more self sustaining narratives. The first part of this unit guides you through the comparisons.

Naipaul's strange relationship with India is shaped by his double diasporic psyche. This would be explored in the second part of this unit by locating *A House for Mr Biswas* in the context of Naipaul's three books on India – *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization* and *India : A Million Mutinies Now*. I would also bring in some relevant interviews given by him to the media. All of this is essential. A proper perspective on Naipaul is a difficult task to achieve when one considers the writer's elusive and contradictory remarks, yet nothing can eclipse the brilliance of his writings, though you may not agree with many of his opinions.

5.1 NAIPAUL'S EARLY WORKS: *THE MYSTIC MASSEUR*

The transformation of Ganesh Ramsumair, from a masseur to a mystic to the impeccably dressed G.R. Muir Esq., MBE is clearly a trope for the socio-cultural and political changes on the island even as the colonizer tried to strengthen his position by involving more and more local individuals in governance.

Ganesh was a successful person. Named after the god who proffers *siddhi* or success to the hard working, Ganesh would be considered lucky in more ways than one. He and Mr Biswas complement each other, the former moved from success to success in a planned, careful sort of way, whereas the latter tired his hand at practically everything though he rarely met with success. Wealth was an important yardstick in measuring social status in early twentieth century Trinidad. After all, the immigrants had crossed the *kala pani* in their quest for money and position. So, someone who could attain both without apparently compromising his ideals or tarnishing his public image was held in awe, almost like Ganesh who epitomizes success in the Hindu pantheon.

The Mystic Masseur is Naipaul's first novel and it has the simplistic approach of most first novels. The language is direct with hints of irony and humour that Naipaul was to perfect in *A House for Mr Biswas*. The first page of *The Mystic Masseur* offers an example of the use of humour in Naipaul's early works. I quote: ' I know the sort of doctors they have in Trinidad', my mother used to say, 'They think nothing of killing two three people before breakfast.' (p.11) In *A House for Mr Biswas* the doctor was a disliked person, always fleecing poor people like Mr Biswas' brothers and being rude to them. The masseur who could heal people by his magic touch and chants provided an alternative medicine held in high esteem by many, mostly in rural areas. Even today, if someone breaks a bone in the old city or rural areas of India, he may go to a masseur for a therapeutic massage and bandaging rather than to an orthopaedic in a hospital.

Mr Biswas loses his parents in the novel but the deaths do not cause much grief as has already been pointed out in an earlier section. Ganesh's response to his father's death is much the same. He fulfils the ritual tasks as commanded by the pundit, Ramlogal and his own aunt, without asking questions. "He remembered having to walk round the body of his father, remembered applying the last caste marks to the old man's forehead, and doing many more things until it seemed that ritual had replaced grief." (p.30)

A newly evolved feeling of respect for the written word and respect for an author who has garnered a reputation runs through Naipaul's early writing. Trinidad did not look upon writing as a profession and offered no encouragement to a writer until he made money. Naipaul's father had not been successful and he himself was a struggling writer in London when he wrote his early novels. Ganesh did not write novels, he wrote philosophical books with titles like *The Road to Happiness, The Soul as I see It* and others which made his name in Trinidad. But his ultimate success came when he became president of the Hindu Association, Trinidad and Tobago, and after that Member of the Legislative Council. While his early political career was modelled on Gandhi's, he slowly became more and more westernized, an MBE tilting the balance towards westernization so that at the end of the novel he was very much the picture of an English gentleman except in appearance.

As for the format of the two novels, *The Mystic Masseur* strikes the reader with its direct appeal. When compared to *A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Mystic Masseur* is almost schematic. The multi-layered narrative that has made *A House for Mr Biswas* a favourite with the post colonial reader, has replaced a simply structured novel with some irony and humour. There is one major innovation. At a time when dialect-dominated novels had not yet come into vogue, Naipaul uses the dialect spoken by Indian immigrants in Trinidad in an authentic way, something that gives the novel a contemporaneous crispness. This technique has been perfected by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children.*

5.2 *MIGUEL STREET*

The stories collected in *Miguel Street* have a much more definite approach. They were written before *The Mystic Masseur* though published later. The opening lines of the first story titled "Bogart" had been in the writer's mind for a long time. It was a conversation, the first part sifted from memory and the second created by imagination. To quote the conversation:

> Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the banister of his back verandah and shout across, 'What happening there, Bogart?'
> Bogart would turn in his bed and mumble softly, so that no one heard, 'What happening there Hat?'
> (Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, p. 9)

If you read *Miguel Street* and *The Mystic Masseur* together you will find that many characters as well as situations overlap, some of which have been taken up and honed to perfection in *A House for Mr Biswas*. Bogart used to live in the same house as Naipaul for quite sometime. It is possibly this close bond that made the narrator gloss over his act of bigamy, even valorize it.

A very close bond existed between all those who lived on *Miguel Street*, a kinship that can be traced back to the *jahazi* brotherhood. Even when Popo the carpenter was caught for stealing, his friends on *Miguel Street* agreed that his stupidity had led to the arrest. The feeling of the community are reflected in words such as these ".... We felt deep inside ourselves that Popo was really a man, perhaps a bigger man than any of us". (Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, p. 20) In *A House for Mr Biswas* there was no such kinship, only jostling for space where no act of creativity could find encouragement.

The limited world of the girmitiya which Mr Biswas tries to transcend, make him an oddity in the eyes of his family as well as others. The camaraderie and an acceptance of one another's failings is possible only if space is shared willingly. Mr Biswas was compelled to share his space with the Tulsi family. As has been pointed out earlier this sharing made him resentful, though at the same time the Tulsi household provided a security which he could not experience on his own. This appears paradoxical, till one looks closely at Mr Biswas's relationship with the Tulsis which oscillates between dependence and resentment.

The *Ramcharitmanas* and the *Gita* were important to the immigrant. Apart from providing a link with India, these texts also gave them a socio-religious anchorage. In *Miguel Street* there is an attitude of defiance towards them, something that was voiced by Mrs Morgan towards a person called Bhakcu who was fond of reading the *Ramcharitmanas* in a doleful singsong voice, lying on his stomach on the bed. Her railings are addressed to Mrs Bhakcu, " Why don't you get your big-belly husband to go and fix some more motor-car, and stop songing" (*Miguel Street*, p. 65). In colonial Trinidad the *Ramcharitmanas* had ceased to be a talisman along with the *Gita* after the indenture period was over. So Bhakcu's knowledge of the *Ramcharitmanas* was not respected till the money making possibilities were suggested to his wife. To quote from "The Mechanical Genius":

> My mother said, 'Well, it easy, easy. He is a Brahmin, he know the *Ramayana*, and he have a car. It easy for him to become a pundit, a real, proper pundit.'
>
> Mrs Bhakcu clapped her hands. ' Is a first class idea. Hindu pundits making a lot of money these days.'
> So Bhakcu became a pundit.
> (Naipaul, *Miguel Street,* p. 126-7)

The concluding sentence of the story, " I was haunted by thoughts of the dhoti-clad Bhakcu crawling under a car, attending to a crank-shaft, while poor Hindus waited for him to attend to their souls." (Naipaul, *Miguel Street*, 127) is an instance of humour in Naipaul's earliest work. Bhakcu was one of his favourite characters and in real life, it was he who drove the narrator to the airport when he was going abroad to study.

Mr Titus Hoyt, who was never called Titus or Mr Hoyt but Mr Titus Hoyt by all those who knew him, reminds one strongly of Mr Biswas who was never referred to as Mohun by the author, always Mr Biswas. Titus Hoyt's photograph in the newspaper along with a letter from one of his young students anonymously contributing to the *Guardian's* "Neediest Cases Fund" was developed into two incidents in *A House for Mr Biswas*. The first was Mr Biswas' attempts to pose as Scarlet Pimpernel for his readers early in his journalistic career, a gimmick that failed miserably and showed the absurdity of his aspirations. The "Neediest Cases Fund" can be identified as the precurser to the Deserving Destitutes Fund that provides many humorous situations in *A House for Mr Biswas*.

Naipaul's first collection of stories compares favourably with *A House for Mr Biswas*. There is a freshness about its humour and a liveliness about the characters and the pace at which the stories move. *Miguel Street* was published at a time when English literature had not acquired a multiracial, multiethnic identity as it has today. The book may now receive a wider readership from those interested in the postcolonial subject.

5.3 *THE SUFFRAGE OF ELVIRA*

The Suffrage of Elvira was Naipaul's first political novel written at a time when any liasion between politics and literature was distrusted. The title is ironical, the word "suffrage" meaning general elections, at the same time hinting at the suffering/inconveniences caused by the elections. Interestingly, Naipaul did not show much interest in the political scene in India in his first novel located in the country. In *A House for Mr Biswas* there is hardly any mention of the political scene in Arwacas, the principal site of the novel.

The Suffrage of Elvira reminds an Indian reader of the way in which general elections were conducted in India in the fifties. Surujput Harbans with his professed secularism, low self esteem despite a sound financial background, could easily pass off as the stereotypical political candidate, not very sure of the votes he controlled. Through him Naipaul makes fun of the elections conducted in former colonies by showing how vote banks were identified and how they were nurtured.

Characters like Ganesh Pundit hovered briefly in the background conveying the idea that Naipaul was working and reworking the same material – his experience in Trinidad. The autobiographical parallels were not so pronounced at this stage as they later became in *A House for Mr Biswas*. Writing about the political situation was an experiment of sorts, later taken up on a large scale in his non fiction as he became a self-appointed spokesperson for several developing nations.

Naipaul often prioritized the situation and not the characters. In *Suffrage of Elvira* the dog named Tiger reminds one of Tarzan in *A House for Mr Biswas*. Like *Miguel Street*, *The Suffrage of Elvira* is quite simplistic, descriptive rather than analytical, presenting a slice of life from the Caribbeans, rather than going into the depths of social organisation. Naipaul was clearly looking for a theme which would serve as a metaphor of the life of the immigrants.

5.4 *MIDDLE PASSAGE*

Middle Passage, a collection of six long essays, collaging travel impressions in Trinidad, British Guiana, Surinam, Martinique and Jamaica, came after *A House for Mr Biswas* and the opening sentence indicated the colonial thrust of the discourse. To quote, "There was such a crowd of immigrant-type west Indians on the boat-train platform at Waterloo that I was glad I was travelling first class to the West Indies". (Naipaul *Middle Passage*, p.11) The descendants of indentured immigrants were trying to sever links with working class immigrants to England and adopted a supercillious attitude towards them. Coming back to Trinidad for a visit was not a homecoming at all for Naipaul. It could not provide a house to a later day Mr Biswas and he associated it with his father's failure. Predictably the judgement passed by Naipaul on Trinidad is harsh and reflects his wish to dissociate himself altogether from the country to which his forefathers migrated. I will quote from it at length as it will help you to link *A House for Mr Biswas* as with Naipaul's books on India which will be taken up in the concluding section of this unit. He says in *Middle Passage* :

> Trinidad was and remains a materialist immigrant society, continually growing and changing, never settling into any pattern, always retaining the atmosphere of the camp; unique in the West Indies in the absence of a history; yet not an expanding society but a colonial society, ruled autocratically if benevolently, with the further limitations of its small size and remoteness. All this has combined to give it its special character, its ebullience and irresponsibility. And more : a tolerance which is more than tolerance and indifference to virtue as well as to vice; The Land of the Calypso is not a copy-writers phrase. It is one side of the truth, and it was this gaiety, so inexplicable to the tourist who sees the shacks of Shanty Town and the corbeaux patrolling the highway, and inexplicable to me who had remembered it as the land of failures, which now, on my return, assualted me. (Naipaul, *Middle Passage*, p. 54)

Clearly Naipaul had made up his mind to assume the persona of the exile, made easier by his double diasporic status. This helps one to understand his attitude to India and compare it to the novel under study that the next part of this unit will undertake.

5.5 NAIPAUL AND INDIA : *AN AREA OF DARKNESS*

Naipaul has yet to write a novel with India as its locale. If one were to go by his vehement condemnation of the novel as a genre in an interview with Ahmed Rashid in Lahore, one would not expect such a novel, or, for that matter any novel. To quote : " I hate the word novel. I can no longer understand why it is important to write or read invented stories. I don't need those extravaganzas". (Interview in *The Observer Review*, p. 16) However, his paradoxical nature and a remark made in India in a television interview in 1998 to the effect that he was being pressurized (by his wife Nadira ?) to write a novel based in India, makes one hope that such a novel may yet be forthcoming.

Among post-1947 travellers to India, Naipaul has a special place because of his curious-love-hate relationship with this country. It is a strange predicament, mainly a tension trying to balance between a desire to remain detached from the mainstream tradition of the country visited and not quite succeeding, out of which is born some sensitive travel writing, impressionistic, emotional and in the first book on India,

rather controversial. In this section I will attempt to establish links between *A House for Mr Biswas* and Naipaul's three books on India, starting with *An Area of Darkness*.

Naipaul's first visit to India was undertaken in 1962, a year after the publication of *A House for Mr Biswas*, ostensibly as a quest for his roots in the country from where his ancestors had migrated to Trinidad. Yet, the name and exact location of his grandfather's village, close to "... this town in eastern Uttar Pradesh, not even graced by a ruin, celebrated only for its connections with the Buddha and its backwardness" (*An Area of Darkness*, p. 266), is not mentioned. The town referred to is possibly Gorakhpur in eastern Uttar Pradesh, near Kapilavastu, Buddha's birthplace.

A visit to this village of Dubeys and Tiwaris with an IAS officer was not a satisfying experience for Naipaul. Two things about his childhood influenced his reaction to the village of the Dubeys in general and his Indian relative Ramchandra in particular. He was disappointed by the absence of community living in his ancestral house, the sort he had experienced in Chaguanas and later in Port of Spain as part of an extended family on his mother's side (fictionally represented as the Tulsi household in Hanuman House). The second was more complex. He had possibly expected his grandfather's branch of the family to be prosperous like others in the village. The poverty that he saw, along with Ranchandra Dubey's tendency to cling to him and make use of him, put an end to his wish to be identified with the Indian branch of his family in any way. Poverty and failure reminded him of his own father.

Naipaul could cut off his connections with the village of the Dubeys and be dismissive about them but he could not sever his Indian connections altogether as his later visits to this country, followed by books that present a semifictional account of his experience, signify. In fact, Naipaul's quest for India had started much earlier, in his childhood. As a boy he associated the old lady in Trinidad who spoke only Hindi and whom everbody called Gold Teeth Nanee, with India. She once drank a glass full of blanco fluid, mistaking it for coconut water and fell seriously ill. "So one India crashed ; and as we got older, living now in the town, Gold Teeth dwindled to a rustic oddity with whom there could be no converse" (Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness*, p. 30) Gold Teeth Nanee clearly a first generation immigrant as she spoke only Hindi could easily fit into the Tulsi household or live on *Miguel Street* or cast her vote in favour of Harbans in the General Election held in Elvira.

Another aspect of India that Naipaul encountered early in life was the caste system and the Hindu-Muslim divide in Trinidad society. F.Z.Ghany the pompous "solicitor conveyancer and a commissioner of oaths (*A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 42) made most of his money from Hindus but distrusted them as a Muslim. Even the way he greeted Tara, Bipti and Mr Biswas indicated a scornful attitude. Such caste loyalties not so obvious normally, erupted violently when the situation was explosive as during the General Elections depicted in *The Suffrage of Elvira*. In *An Area of Darkness* and *A House for Mr Biswas* Naipaul expressed no special preference for politics. Later, during subsequent visits to India, he developed an interest in the political set up here and attempted to analyze it in *India ; A Wounded* Civilization and *India : A Million Mutinies Now*.

Closely related with this is Naipaul's brahmanic arrogance and a conscious effort to subvert his brahmanism, albeit unsuccessfully. Caste and religion were institutional for descendants of indentured immigrants, which provided them with security and protected their identity. Naipaul's attempts to disparage the caste system, his refusal to go through the *janawa* (the sacred thread) ceremony were not really rebellions against the caste system; they were nothing more than token gestures as he always defended his exclusivity, an attitude common to diasporans. The ambivalence or paradox was to become a part of his style, helping him to maintain a " too close yet too far" attitude towards India.

This explains his use of the word "pilgrimage" for a visit to the Amarnath Cave, a trip which he enjoyed as much as his trip to Kashmir. To quote from his reminiscences :

> It was the joy of being among the mountains; it was the special joy of being among the Himalayas. I felt linked to them. I liked speaking the name. India, the Himalayas : they went together. In so many of the brightly coloured religious pictures in my grandmother's house I had seen these mountains, cones of white against simple, cold blue. They had become part of the India of my fantasy. It would have astonished me then, in a Trinidad achingly remote from places that seemed worthwhile and real become fully known, to be told that one day I would walk among the originals of those mountains.
> (Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness*, p.176 – 7)

This was one of the few places where the physical India corresponded with the India of Naipaul's dreams and provided a resting place for his imagination.

In the course of his post-1962 visits to India, Naipaul concerned himself with ethnographic analyses of Indians, at the same time keeping a distance from the ordinary person most of the time, talking mainly to those in authority and power, like the IAS officer in Bombay, the commissioner in Rajasthan. As a postcolonial traveller who was unable to establish an Indian identity and had given up the attempt to do so after his first visit to this country, Naipaul predictably held the view that India should sever all connections with the past, as perhaps Mr Biswas had done by finally moving into a house that was more western than Indian in appearance and a contrast to Hanuman house.

5.6 *INDIA : A MILLION MUTINIES NOW*

One cannot really compare Naipaul's third book on India, *India : A Million Mutinies Now* with *A House for Mr Biswas* but there are certain perceptions which can be traced back to his Trinidad Indian background. For example, his sympathy for minorities in India can be interpreted as a vicarious association with his own past, expressed from a secure position in the west, financially and professionally. So, a visit to the Muslim ghetto on Muhammad Ali Road in Mumbai made him understand the strong bond between the residents.

> I felt that if I had been in their position, confined to Bombay, to that area, to that row, I too would have been a passionate Muslim. I had grown up in Trinidad as a member of the Indian community, a member of a minority, and I knew that if you felt that your community was small you could never walk away from it ; the grimmer things became, the more you insisted on being what you were. (Naipaul, *India : A Million Mutinies Now*, p. 31)

The same applies to his perspective on the Punjab problem, which sees resentment against the central government as the root cause.

To some extent you can compare *An Area of Darkness* with *A House for Mr Biswas* but an attempt at analogizing Naipaul's other books on India do not yield too many parallels.

5.7 LET US SUM UP

You would have, by now formed your own opinion on V.S.Naipaul. Let me warn you he is paradoxical and often changes views expressed on an earlier occasion. An example : after declaring to a journalist last year that the novel was extinct, when

Tarun Tejpal of *Outlook* asked him whether he was serious about writing another novel, his answer was, "I'm being pressed, you know. I'm being pressed although I feel I've moved away from the form and read very few novels now and I thought that the kind of work I have to do should be a little bit in the nature of my last four books. But I'm pressed and I might do something like a political fairy tale." (*Outlook*, 88 March 23, 1998)

What you should prioritize in your study of Naipaul is the way he develops his style, striving to make his prose jargon free, more "transparent" to use his words, as he considers words "valuable"and to be used with a lot of thought and care. This, I feel is the reason that makes Naipaul one of the greatest writers of the world though his viewpoints are often controversial.

5.8 GLOSSARY

Self-sustained narrative: A narrative that can stand on its own.

Multi-layered narrative: A narrative that is open to different levels of reading and interpretation.

5.9 QUESTIONS

1 Naipaul's ambivalence towards India originates from his diasporic status. Comment with a comparatist study of *A House for Mr Biswas* and Naipaul's three books on India.

2 In *A House for Mr Biswas* Naipaul works and reworks the same material used in his earlier fiction. Comment with examples from the relevant texts.

5.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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MAEN-119
New Literatures In English

Block

6

CARIBBEAN POETRY: *DEREK WALCOTT AND EDWARD BRATHWAITE*

Block Introduction

UNIT 1
Introduction to Caribbean poetry 7

UNIT 2
Darek Walecott-I 18

UNIT 3
Darek Walecott-II 34

UNIT 4
(Edward) Kamau Brathwaite-I 56

UNIT 5
(Edward) Kamau Brathwaite-II 73

UNIT 6
Theoretical Paradigms for Carribbean Literatures 93

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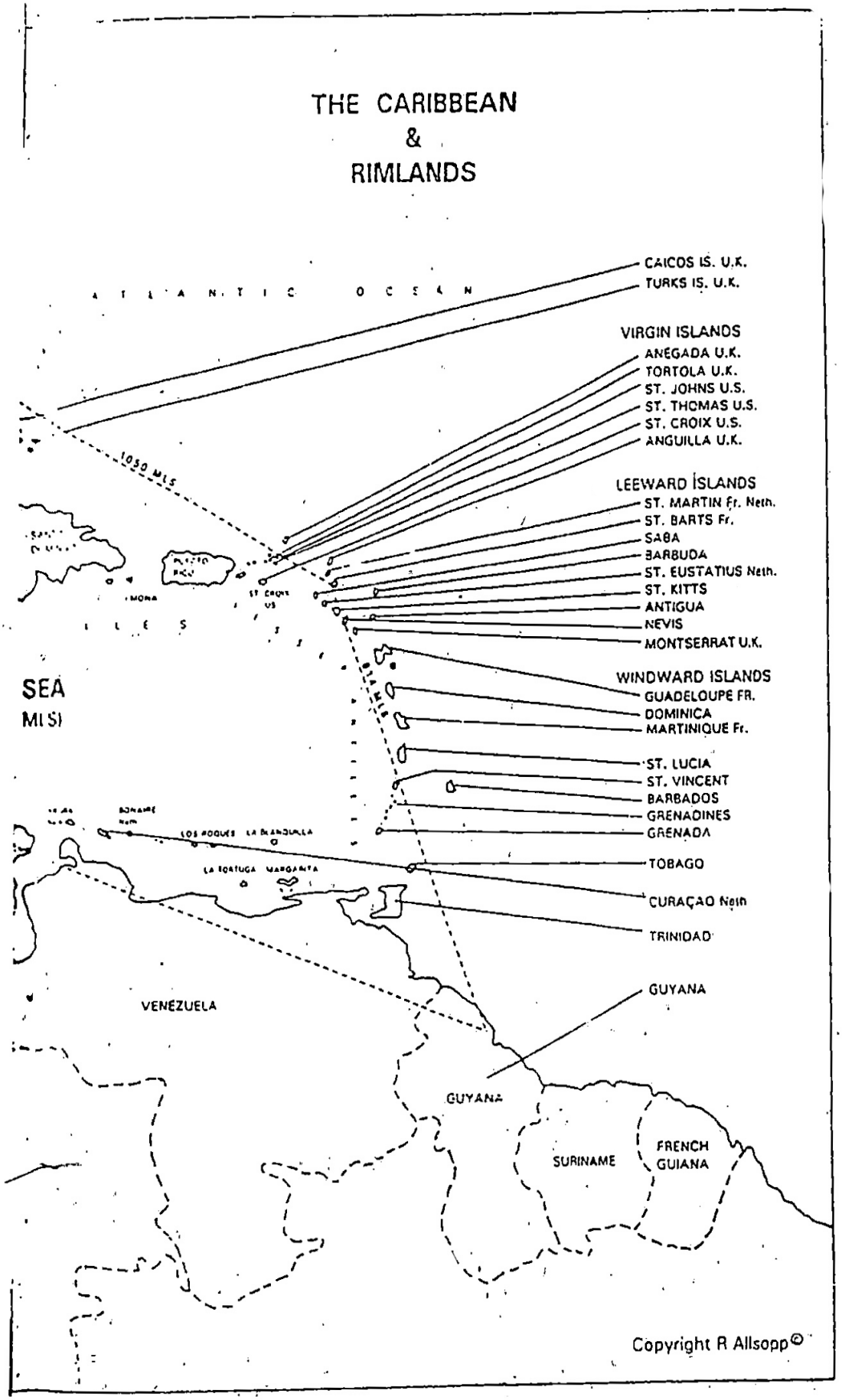
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THE CARIBBEAN
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MAEN-119/345

INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 6

CARIBBEAN POETRY: DEREK WALCOTT AND EDWARD BRATHWAITE

In the previous block you read about V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* which etches the life of Indian immigrants in the Caribbean island Trinidad. Caribbean society emerged out of successive waves of free as well as forced migration from Europe, Africa and Asia. The cultures of these various people contributed to the formation of what can, broadly speaking, be called Caribbean culture and yet they preserve the markers of their distinct identity. It is the apparently conflictual paradigms of distinctness and the possibility of assimilation which emerge as important issues in the poetry of Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite. Reading the work of these two poets together in this block will enable you to get a clearer picture of this issue since Walcott and Brathwaite articulate two almost diametrically opposed stands on it. While Walcott has laid emphasis on the multicultural diversity of the Caribbeans, Brathwaite's focus has been almost exclusively on the African roots of Caribbean culture. The colonisation of the region will be the context within which Caribbean poetry will be discussed. The six units will be structured on the basis of the following outlines:

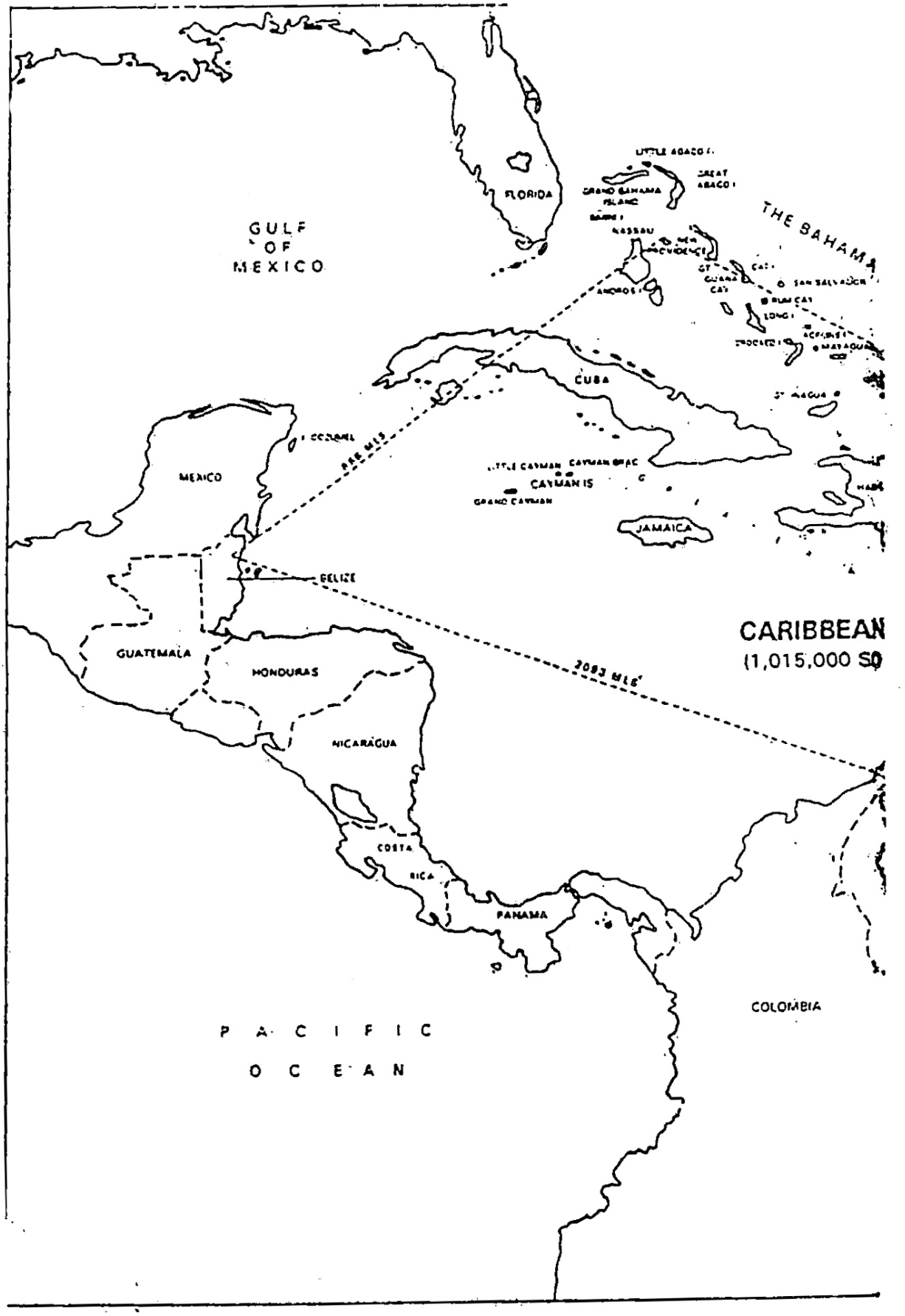
UNIT ONE contains an account of the history of the colonisation of the region with emphasis on the patterns of language usage by the colonised population. This will be followed by an introduction to Caribbean poetry and how it variously endorses, reflects and subverts the processes of colonial control.

UNITS TWO AND THREE will focus on the biographical details, drama and criticism of Derek Walcott followed by a discussion of his poems.

UNITS FOUR AND FIVE will outline the biography, the cultural and historical commentary of Edward Brathwaite and an analysis of poems from his oeuvre.

Walcot's Brathwaite's and other' views on aspects of Caribbean, literature and cultureal and theoretical paradigms. will be summaristed in UNIT SIX

You can begin by reading Unit One and then move on directly to the poems. This will enable you to see for yourself to what extent historical processes influentce the literature of a particular region. It is very importnant that you read and re-read the poems, first without the explanation and subsequently with the detailed conments I have given. This will help you to understand the various culture specifit words and ideas used in Caribbean poetry. For an extended discussion of these, the last unit will prove useful. Do not forget to attempt the exercises at the end of each unit to find out how much you have understood of Caribbean poetry.


GULF
OF
MEXICO
FLORIDA
THE BAHAMA
CUBA
MEXICO
BELIZE
GUATEMALA
HONDURAS
NICARAGUA
COSTA
RICA
PANAMA
JAMAICA
CAYMAN IS
COLOMBIA
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CARIBBEAN
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UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO CARIBBEAN POETRY

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 The Region
  1.1.1 Colonisation
  1.1.2 Resistance
  1.1.3 Emancipation
1.2 Language
  1.2.1 Creole, creole, the creole continuum
  1.2.2 *creolité* and *antillanité*
  1.2.3 nation language/creole
1.3 Literature
  1.3.1 creole poetry
  1.3.2 History and poetry
1.4 Let Us Sum Up
1.5 Glossary
1.6 Questions
1.7 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will provide an introduction to the historical processes which have given the Caribbean islands their cultural and literary identity. The discussion will be with reference to the various ways in which the historical fact of colonisation imbricates peoples' minds. The direct consequence of this was slavery accompanied with attempts to eradicate through all means the traces of their own culture from the slave population's consciousness. I deal primarily with what I consider the most effective means employed to do so, the imposition of the colonisers' language and the subversion of this means of control by the slaves' use of creole. The pan-Caribbean dimensions of the politics of language is apparent from the writings of Aimé Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Edouard Glissant. The unit concludes with a survey of twentieth century Caribbean poets' perception of history and the ideology informing their representations.

1.1 THE REGION

The term 'Caribbean' indicates the geographical region including all the territories associated with European powers like Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and others. The territories that were part of the British empire came together as the West Indian Federation in 1962. After the break-up of the federation the islands comprising it became independent in the 1960s. Even now there is a common cricketing team of the West Indians. Like sports, literature also continues to be considered regionally rather than nationally. Thus accounts like Stewart Brown's which discuss West Indian poetry are more common than those of Barbadian, St. Lucian or Trinidadian poetry. So the term 'West Indian' is based on the linguistic determinant of the use of English while 'Caribbean' emphasises geographical and historical determinants (Ashcroft *et al* 18).

1.1.1 Colonisation

At the time of Columbus's 'discovery' of Hispaniola in 1492 the Caribbean islands were inhabited by the Caribs who were in the process of subduing the culturally less

advanced tribes of the Tainos, the Arawaks and the Ciboneyes. It is from this date till about the middle of the sixteenth century that native depopulation took place in this region. A small number of African slaves came on Columbus's second voyage in 1494 and in 1498 six hundred Indians were shipped back to Spain. By the sixteenth century the demand for African slaves had increased in the wake of the decimation of the **Amerindian** tribes. In this period African slaves were being imported in large numbers first to work in mines and then as workers in sugar plantations. Following the capture of some of the islands by the British a sizeable population of West African slaves had been brought over by them as manual labour for the cultivation of sugarcane. If you have read Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* you will remember that Fanny's uncle Sir Thomas Bertram leaves England to look after his Antiguan estates or that Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is married to Bertha Mason, the daughter of a Jamaican plantation owner. The above-given examples point to the fact that British authors were aware of the economic imperatives involved in its overseas dominions and their impact on the social structure at home.

The major European powers which sought control of the Caribbean were Britain, France and Spain. The development of the territories controlled by them followed almost the same pattern leading them to become "plantation colonies." However, the slave population differed significantly in these regions. In the Hispanic Caribbean islands the slaves comprised about fifty per cent of the total population whereas in the British and French Caribbean they formed eighty five to ninety per cent of the inhabitants. It should be obvious to you that the main motives for colonisation were economic. Here is what Aimé Césaire from Martinique, a former French Caribbean colony, has to say in response to the question, "What, fundamentally, is colonization?":

> neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. . . . the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale, the competition of its antagonistic economies. (10-11)

I find this passage remarkable for the way in which Césaire here lists the religious, philanthropic, psychological, ethnographic, sociological and political justifications offered by the colonisers and demolishes any attempt on their part to show the innate superiority of European systems of social organization. Materialism in its legal and illegal forms is shown to be the primary motive behind the colonial enterprise. The ideological thrust of Césaire's work *Discourse on Colonialism* (1995) is a systematic defence of "Negro civilization," as the passage just quoted aptly demonstrates in its overturning of European civilizational superiority.

1.1.2 Resistance

The exploitation of the slaves by their colonial masters did not go unchecked. Resistance took many forms, primary among them being the slave revolts which occurred sporadically all over the Caribbean. In the sixteenth century there were revolts in various parts of the Hispanic Caribbean: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Honduras and New Spain. In the seventeenth century there was a series of slave revolts historians have labelled the "Akan revolts" in the British Caribbean island of Antigua. In 165[illegible] when the British captured Jamaica from the Spanish some African slaves escaped to the hills. They joined others who were hunters and herdsmen and who were

thoroughly familiar with the mountainous region. These were the first Maroons, a group which refused to accept slave status and resorted to guerrilla tactics to protect themselves. From 1690 to 1740 the Maroons were engaged in almost constant guerrilla warfare with the British forces. These risings did not imply that all the Africans were united in their struggle against slavery. For instance the Maroons, who had always been free, looked down upon the escaped slaves. This view included Creoles, that is, those slaves born on the islands, descendants of those who were transported through the **Middle Passage** from Africa to the New World. New arrivals from Africa, derisively known as Freshwater Negroes, were also looked down upon. There was also hostility between the Creole slaves and the Africans, the former accusing the latter of inciting them to rebellion. Hence the revolts which occurred during the sixteenth and seventeenth century were made less effective due to lack of cohesiveness. Historically the most important insurrection took place in the French Caribbean island of Haiti at San Domingo in 1791. Under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture (Pierre Domingo), a black man who had been a slave till the age of forty five, the San Domingo revolution culminated in the establishment of Haiti as the first black republic of the New World.

You may wonder why it is important for us to know about the history of resistance in the Caribbean. This is because the leaders of these struggles, men like Toussaint, became transformed into heroes in the popular imagination. Songs were sung about these victories, poems were written about them. Speaking about how he came to develop the concept of **Negritude**, Césaire, in an interview with the Haitian poet and militant René Depestre said: "Negritude [is] action. Haiti is the country where Negro people stood up for the first time, affirming their determination to shape a new world, a free world" (75). Explaining the concept of **Antillean** Negritude Césaire says "it was really a resistance to the politics of assimilation," and came into existence because "Antilleans were ashamed of being Negroes." Haiti represents for him "the heroic Antilles, the African Antilles . . . Haiti is the most African of Antilles. It is at the same time a country with a marvellous history: the first Negro epic of the New World was written by Haitians, people like Toussaint l'Ouverture, Henri Christophe, Jean Jacques Dessalines . . ." (72-74).

The case of Haiti illustrates the importance of successful resistance. Its effect on the creative imagination is evident in Cesaire's *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1939) where the first occurrence of the word Negritude coincides with an allusion to the Haitian fight for independence.

1.1.3 Emancipation

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the slave imports continued unabated. Between 1801 and 1807 sixty three thousand slaves were brought to the island of Jamaica. Oppression was practiced with a different emphasis, it was not so much physical as institutional violence which was the norm particularly after Britain was forced to abolish slavery in its territories due to growing pressure at home. Even though slavery ended by 1833 in the British colonies, all major decisions were made through the colonial office. Thirty thousand pounds per annum were granted for the education of former slaves. Religious and secular education was imparted in an effort to convert them into docile wage earners. The nineteenth century saw an intensified growth of both the formal church and authentic African cults. An important rising of this century was the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica. Largely a demand for control of their rightful share of the land which was under the absentee owners of large estates, the march to the Morant Bay court resulted in the execution of over four hundred people. Among those executed were Paul Bogle, a Baptist minister, and a coloured member of parliament, George William Gordon.

Violence against the peasantry took severe economic forms as well. Indentured labourers from China, India and some European countries were brought over to keep the wages low and the peasantry in a state of perpetual poverty. The opening decades of the twentieth century were years of economic crisis. Hurricanes and droughts

caused losses to the sugar industry which was already losing out to foreign competition in the world market. In spite of high levels of unemployment planters in Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad chose to bring over East Indian indentured labourers rather than pay high wages to local people. Due to unemployment there was widespread migration from rural areas into cities, the departure from the land being associated with a sense of spiritual loss.

1.2 LANGUAGE

1.2.1 Creole, creole, the creole continuum

Colonial control and resistance to it took the form of revolutions and battles. Language too is an effective medium for exerting control and battles can be fought on the linguistic terrain. Discussing the politics of language in African literature the Kenyan novelist, playwright and activist Ngugi wa Thiong'O states: "The domination of a people's language by the language of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised" (16). Applying this to the Caribbean situation one sees the various ways in which the slaves were discouraged from using their native languages. They were separated from other slaves of the same linguistic background because their masters feared that communication between them might lead to plans of escape or rebellion. The gradual erasure of the native language from their minds was accompanied with the use of creole, an adaptation of the coloniser's language. Please do not confuse between Creole and creole. Both words derive from the Spanish word "*criollo*" which means native born in the New World. However, the former (spelt with a capital C) was first used with pride by European colonists to refer to themselves as born and bred in the New World and was later used to distinguish slaves born in the Caribbean as distinct from those brought over from Africa. The latter, creole, (spelt with a small c) refers to any one of a family of languages developed in the Caribbean by African slaves in contact with one or more of the European languages (English, French, Spanish, Portugese or Dutch). It became the first language for succeeding generations.

In any given region in the Caribbean a multitude of dialects interweave to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum, thus making the discourse "polyglossic or polydialectical" (Ashcroft *et al* 39). The theory of the creole continuum or more accurately the "post-creole speech continuum" arises out of this polyglossic situation. I shall explain what this means in simple terms. In a single speech community (say English speaking) people might use variants ranging from creolized forms at one end to language forms closer to standard (English) language at the other end. Most individuals command competence of a small range of varieties along the linguistic continuum, "the breadth of the span depending on the breadth of [their] social contacts" (Decamp qtd. in Donnell and Welsh 13). To put it simply, the more educated a person the more likely is he to speak the standard form of the language. Or a person might speak creole as the language of daily common contact and use the standard form at his place of work. This theory then affirms the notion of language as practice.

1.2.2 *creolité* and *antillanité*

The status of creole has been one of the most widely debated theoretical issues in the Caribbean. It is from the francophone Caribbean island of Martinique that most theoretical discussion has been produced. Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Edouard Glisant have given considerable attention to the disputed terrain of language in the Caribbean. Like the anglophone Caribbean islands, the francophone Caribbean faced linguistic imperialism. This was experienced in an intensified form in Martinique which continues to be an overseas department of France following a legislative act of 1948. When Césaire was born in 1913, Martinique, his "native land" was still a

French colony which bore the traces of three hundred years of slavery. He forwards the idea of breaking free from French literary traditions and of creating "a new language, one capable of communicating the African heritage" (*Discourse* 66-67). The creative expression of this is his *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1939). Although Césaire spoke of inscribing French with the African heritage he had a very conservative position on *créolité* or creolity, he said that it was already included in Negritude. His own knowledge of creole was very poor and he remarked on the low level of creolity which made it incapable of expressing abstract ideas.

Recently a group of Caribbean writers have adopted *créolité* as a key word and see themselves as direct descendants of Césaire. So although Césaire did not use creole himself, his work on language has inspired others who, even while acknowledging his influence, move away from some of the tenets of Negritude and embrace a more global and less essentially racial theory of *créolité*. Glissant for instance speaks of *antillanité* as "more than a theory, a vision," the word can be translated as Caribbeanness. Referring to the anglophone Antilles or English speaking Caribbean, Glissant comments that they distrust the theory of Caribbeanness but try to make it work. In *Caribbean Discourse* (1989) Glissant discusses the relationship between language and identity in an essay titled "Natural Poetics, Forced Poetics." Here creole is seen as an expression of forced poetics "created from the awareness of the opposition between a language that one uses and a form of expression that one needs" (121). This means that creole emerged from the clash of the language(s) used by the slaves which they were forbidden to speak in their new surroundings and the language of the colonial masters which they perforce needed to use for communication. Since creole was also the language used by the slaves to communicate with their owners it developed subversive strategies. According to Glissant the subversive potential inherent in its usage was a kind of conspiracy to conceal meaning by its public and open expression (125). He does not foresee the continuance of creole usage in Martinique but his views about the possibility of it being used in the anglophone Caribbean are optimistic. This is because although the people from these countries are as English as the Martinicans are French, "they do not want to be English" (Glissant 261). And it is this desire to be Caribbean not English which is reflected in Brathwaite's coinage of the term "nation language."

1.2.3 nation language/creole

Before I go on to outline Brathwaite's views on language I will point out some of the class-based assumptions associated with the use of creole. Commenting on the negro and the question of language in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Fanon focussed attention on the class dimension in the use of creole in Martinique. It was, as Fanon said, used only by the middle class to speak to their servants. Children were taught to avoid creolisms. He locates in this a colonialist strategy for alienating coloured people from their own civilization and culture. Recently Merle Hodge has observed that although creole is the main medium of communication in the Caribbean, the attitude of the people towards it is one of contempt, parents reprimand their children for using it. This, she says, has serious implications for the mental health since the deepest thought processes of the people are bound up in the structure of their language (Hodge, *Reader* 495).

The term "creolized English" refers to spoken English that has retained some obvious structural characteristics of creole while it develops more of the features of internationally accepted spoken English. I have pointed out above how the use of creole is looked down upon so it is no wonder that in the anglophone Caribbean there is a move towards the use of standard English. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* distinguish between English and what they call "post-colonial englishes" to indicate the forms taken by this language in post-colonial societies. Creolized English would, in the terms set out by the authors of this book, be an example of the "linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world" (Ashcroft *et al* 8). The term "non-standard forms of English" when applied to creoles can be taken pejorative sense

but I think what Ashcroft *et al* are emphasizing are variations in the use of the language rather than passing any value judgement on "englishes." Quite often creoles are erroneously considered to be approximate language systems whereas in fact they are language systems in their own right, with considerably sophisticated syntax and lexicons. Brathwaite's term "nation language" affirms a positive status for an English "influenced by the underground language, the submerged language that the slaves had brought" (262). It is a non-standard form of English inasmuch as its syntax, rhythm and timbre is concerned. Brathwaite contrasts "nation language" with dialect which is thought of as "bad English." Like Glissant, Brathwaite outlines the subversive potential in the use of nation language because it is the submerged area of a dialect which is closely related to the "African aspect of experience in the Caribbean" (266). Its characteristic features are its orality and musicality and its effect is lost if it is written down (270-71). Brathwaite's own poetry, much of which is performative, concretises the "total effect" of nation language. The importance of Brathwaite's coinage of the term and his explication of its meaning lies in the revolutionary potential he attributes to language as an effective means of cultural resistance. It does away with the traditional denigration of creole and asserts its efficacy as a means of literary expression.

1.3 LITERATURE

1.3.1 creole poetry

Claude McKay's collections *Songs of Jamaica* (1912) and *Constab Ballads* (1912) provide one of the earliest instances of the use of creole for literary purposes. McKay (1899-1940) was born in Jamaica and was a policeman in the constabulary there for some years before emigrating to the States. There he became a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance so much so that he is often thought of as an American poet. Brathwaite calls McKay's first two books of poetry published in 1912 "the first all-dialect collections from an anglophone Caribbean poet" (275). Here is an extract from the ending of his poem titled "A Midnight Woman to the Bobby":

> Say wha'? res' me? - you go to hell!
> You t'ink Judge don't know unno well?
> You t'ink him givin' go sentance me
> Wid out a soul fe witness I? (*Reader* 66)

Here the "midnight woman," probably a prostitute, is expressing her indignation at the high-handedness of the policeman. What I want to bring to your notice in the lines given above is the immediacy and resilience of ordinary speech patterns. The woman challenges the policeman to arrest her, then says that the judge knows all about him and won't sentence her without any witnesses to the crime (of soliciting customers) she is charged with. The creole words used here are "unno," which means "you" collectively and "fe" which is a preposition widely used in narrative dialogue to indicate "for." On the basis of the language he uses one would expect McKay's poetry to be called nation language poetry. However, he is denied the status of a nation language poet by Brathwaite primarily because of his "literary colonialism and primordial anglicanism" as evinced in his early works. According to Brathwaite, McKay let himself be "imprisoned in pentameter" (275). This clearly indicates that it is not merely the words used, but also the ideology espoused by an author in his choice of structure, style and content which raises a poem from dialect to nation language. So although McKay's is creole poetry, in Brathwaite's view, it does little in terms of the "revolutionary" impact language can be made to possess.

I cite Brathwaite's views on McKay only to indicate how what is new may not be perceived as entirely radical. This does not in any way undermine his achievement or his influence on later poets. McKay's insistence on the value of everyday speech and

experience and his interest in folk traditions in these early collections is one of the first instances of a re-version of the paradigms of what constitutes literariness in poetry. This is also evident in the poetry of Una Masson (1905-65) and Louise Bennett (b.1919-)and has led to problems in the critical reception of their work. Bennett's poetry in particular is primarily oral in its thematic and structural principles. Here are a few lines from her poem "Jamaica Oman":

> Jamaica oman, cunny, sah!
> Is how dem jinnal so?
> Look how long dem liberated
> An de man dem never know!
>
> Look how long Jamaica oman
> -Modder, sister, wife, sweatheart -
> Outa road an eena yard deh pon
> A dominate her part! (*Reader* 145)

Notice that the style is similar to McKay's, with a similar omitting of certain letters in a word (like the w from woman) and use of creolisms. In the first line it is said that the Jamaican woman is cunning, a quality revealed in "jinnal" or the ability to find quick solutions to a difficulty. The poet makes a feminist statement when she says that these women have been "liberated" for a long time without letting the men have any knowledge of it. In the same poem Bennett goes on to say that long before women's liberation was heard of, the Jamaican women had chalked out their plans. It is a part of her feminist agenda that she chooses to write in everyday speech and about ordinary experiences. She is also a performer of her own poetry and is a pioneering figure in the oral traditions of Caribbean poetry. The titles of some of her other poems "Bed-time story," "Proverbs" indicate her close connections to folk traditions. In her poetry there is a conscious rejection of imposed traditions and imitative style. In an interview with Dennis Scott she has talked about her reasons for writing in dialect: "I began to wonder why more of our poets and writers were not taking more of an interest in the kind of language usage and the kind of experiences of living which were all around us, and writing in this medium of dialect instead of writing in the same old English way about Autumn and things like that" (*Hinterland* 47).

I hope that you have understood why the use of creole for poetic purposes was so important. First, it indicated an acceptance of non-standard forms of the English language even if it continued to be called "dialect" both by the practitioners and their critics. Second, at least for some of the poets who used creole, it marked a break from slavish imitation of English poetry ("Autumn and things like that"). Finally, and this is linked to the second reason, it was the language which could most suitably express the Caribbean or the local reality perceived by the poet.

1.3.2 History and poetry

In discussing poetic uses of creole I have tried to emphasise the resistance to the language and poetic forms of the coloniser. It would be simplistic to say that Caribbean poetry, like Caribbean history, is an expression of almost continuous resistance, whether stylistic or thematic. Edward Baugh in *West Indian Poetry 1900-1970: A Study in Cultural Decolonisation* traces the earliest poetic expressions of the West Indian situation and affirms: "The development of poetry in the West Indies reflects the colonial experience of the region " (*Reader* 100). According to Baugh, poets before 1940 produced a "strictly colonial poetry" influenced by the Neo-classical, Romantic and Victorian poetry of the "mother country," Britain. It is easy to see that such generalisations are inapplicable in many cases when applied to pre-1940 poetry like McKay's early collections. Baugh's definition of "colonial poetry" does not merely include poetry which glorifies or endorses colonialism but also that which, although it might be rooted in local reality and express patriotic sentiments, is servilely imitative of the trends in English poetry. An instance of the former is to be

found in Albinia Hutton's poem "A Plea" (1932) in which Britain is seen as a caring mother and the inhabitants of the colonies as her children:

> We have our Christian names, and what they are
> Thou knowest, nay, who knowest half so well
> As thou dost, thou the Mother? Canada,
> South Africa, Australia, India,
> New Zealand. Far too numerous to tell,
>
> With them a host of smaller gems as fair
> Sweet pearls ingathered from the Summer Seas
> And strung together for a necklet rare
> To deck thy queenly bosom, shining there
> In loveliness, Jamaica is of these. (*Reader* 55)

This has been called the "gendering of colonial affiliation" as evinced by Britain being personified as the queenly mother who is adorned ("smaller gems," "sweet pearls," "necklet rare") with her colonies. Such a clear acknowledgement and endorsement of Britain's supremacy is also present in the poetry of Tom Redcam and J.E. McFarlane. In Redcam's poem "O, Little Green Island Far Over the Sea" (1929) the feelings of nostalgia and admiration for England mingle with his love for Jamaica, the Caribbean island he had adopted as his home:

> For England is England, the strong and the true,
> Whose word is her bond in her march through the blue.
> . . . . . .
> But my little Green Island, far over the sea,
> At eve-tide, Jamaica, my heart turns to thee. (*Reader* 46)

It was not as if all the poetry written in the first half of the twentieth century was jingoistic in tone or imitative in style. In 1904 Mary Adella Walcott, under the pseudonym of Tropica, wrote about various aspects of plantation culture: the slaves, the big houses run efficiently by coloured servants cum housekeepers called "Nanas" and "Bushas" or overseers on cane and banana plantations. Her poem "The Undertone" has for its epigraph two lines from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." The "still sad music of humanity" whose undertone can be caught beneath "the brightness of the Southern day" is the "far, faint cry of wounded slaves in chains." The guilt-ridden past and attempts to obliterate it by dismissing it as "nonsense" and "old nurses' tales" is foregrounded in this poem which makes no claims to British superiority in order to justify colonialism. .

In his later poetry Claude McKay fixes the blame for the colonial guilt expressed in the writings of Mary Adella Walcott and other white poets. Written in standard English his poems "In Bondage" and "Outcaste" (both 1953) express a longing for the African past lost forever by forced emigration to the New World. The nostalgia for a "native clime" is juxtaposed with "the white man's menace" which made black people "simple slaves" of "ruthless slaves," the latter being the white masters who were enslaved to "insatiate lust" for power. These expressions of oppression are balanced by poetic articulations of moments of resistance. Mervyn Morris's (b.1937) short poem "The House Slave" captures succinctly the aftermath of a slave rebellion through the thoughts of a slave left alone in the house abandoned by his former master: "And these are my rooms now:/ My pallid masters fled,/ freeing the only home I knew" (*Hinterland* 167). Significantly the slave does not use the word "freedom" in connection with himself, he applies it only to the house. This indicates an internalisation of oppression which does not lift even under changed circumstances. And yet there are poetic expressions which move beyond the past towards an optimistic future. Vera Bell's 1948 poem "Ancestor on the Auction Block" takes cognizance of the humiliating past of slavery only to signal towards

played by the ancestors, who were slaves, in the birth of a "country":

> Within your loins I see the seed
> Of multitudes
> From your labour
> Grow roads, acqueducts, cultivation
> A new country is born
> Yours was the task to clear the ground
> Mine be the task to build. (*Reader* 156)

The last line of Bell's poem points to a sense of responsibility felt by the poetic persona who feels the need to "build" upon the foundations laid by the ancestor.

One of the main concerns of post-1950 Caribbean poetry is to "build" a literary edifice not based on European models but reflective of Caribbean reality. Here is the narrator of Olive Senior's (b.1943-) poem "Cockpit Country Dreams" who remembers her mother showing her photo albums of "black ancestors" and telling her that "Herein/ Your ancestry, your imagery, your pride./ Choose *this* river, *this* rhythm, *this* road./ Walk good in the footsteps of *these* fathers" (*Hinterland* 218). The title of the poem derives from cockpits, deep depressions or glens found in the mountains of Jamaica. This was the rugged terrain preferred by the Maroons, people who refused to accept their slave status. The child in the poem feels a sense of cultural maroonage or alienation from the reality around her. Her mother's exhortation does not suffice to keep her mind "slipping/ those well-worn grooves of piety, work, praise" and she feels "drown[ed] in the other's history" (*Hinterland* 218, 219). The idea that the Caribbean is a region without history "discovered" by Europe, from which discovery its history is said to begin, was perpetuated by colonial historiographers. Arguments countering this view include the attempts to make available the hitherto undocumented facets of Caribbean history: cultures of the tribes existing before Columbus's arrival, slave rebellions during the era of colonialism, existence of communities like the Maroons and the continuance of African traditions in the Caribbean. I have discussed this in greater detail in Unit 6.

As has previously been mentioned, the Caribbean became home to people from Asia who came as indentured labour and then stayed on. In trade, commerce, religion, food, dress, music and language, the descendants of these emigrants, particularly the Indians and the Chinese, have influenced Caribbean culture in a major way. In Guyana and Trinidad over half the current population are of East Indian descent. V.S. Naipaul is perhaps the best known Indo-Caribbean writer of our times. The writers of these ethnicities have documented their ancestors' and their own presence in the Caribbean. Writing in the 1980s. Mahadai Das in her poem "They Came in Ships" attempts to link the arrival of indentured labourers or "Coolies" with the coming of African slaves. At the same time she is fully aware of the very different socio-historical conditions which led to these two "**diasporas**" to the Caribbean. Cyril and David Dabydeen from Guyana have also voiced the diasporic consciousness of people of Indian origin from a very different perspective. Their bonding with the Caribbean is one with an "imaginary homeland" since they have opted to migrate to Canada and Britain respectively. In his poems David Dabydeen speaks both of Indians in the Caribbean as in "Coolie Mother" and also of those chosen few like the "Coolie Son" who migrate to the first world in search of better prospects. Ironically the coolie mother who wants her son to "Learn talk proper, take exam, go to England university,/ Not turn out like he rum-sucker chamar dadee" receives a letter from her coolie son who is a toilet attendant in England (*Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry* 62-63). Notice the use of words like "chamar" and "coolie" and observe how Hindi words have become a part of Caribbean poetic vocabulary.

I have chosen to give examples from Indo-Caribbean poetry in the last part of this section. This does not in any way indicate that only poets of Indian descent have had

an impact on the Caribbean literary and cultural scenario. The writers of Chinese, Portugese, Irish and Syrian ancestry have also contributed significantly to the eclectic nature of Caribbean literature and society.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

From a Eurocentric perspective Caribbean history is said to begin with Columbus's arrival in 1492. The colonisation of the region was based on economic imperatives and consisted largely of forced migration of Africans as slaves who were denied even linguistic freedom. Almost continuous resistance, whether on the level of language through the use of creole or on the level of combat through the existence of Maroons, characterises the three hundred years of oppression. A variety of stances are evident in Caribbean poetry: the colonialist impulse which leads to jingoistic and imitative poetry like the work of Albinia Hutton; the anti-colonial strategies as evinced in the use of creole language by Claude McKay and Louise Bennett and finally poetry expressing post-colonial concerns of multi-culturalism, hybridity, diaspora. These concerns have been voiced by writers of various ethnicities including those belonging to East Asian Caribbean communities like Cyril and David Dabydeen. The Caribbean culture is a site of amalgamation and assimilation of many different cultures: Amerindian, European, African and Asian. The term creolization when applied in the sense of the development of marked Caribbean characteristics can serve as an apt metaphor for its cultural syncretism.

1.5 GLOSSARY

Amerindian : A member of the Mongoloid race of people whose many 'tribes' were the original inhabitants of the Caribbean and the Americas.

Antilles : Collective name for all the Caribbean islands except The Bahamas. Conceived of as falling into two broad groups - the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico) and the Lesser Antilles comprising all the other islands to the East and South of these four.

Dialect : Subordinate variety of a language with non-standard vocabulary, pronunciation or idioms.

Diaspora (in *this* context): A term used for large scale migration of people from the country of their origin to other countries, either voluntarily or due to economic or political compulsions. When we speak of the Indian diaspora we mean Indians settled in England, America, Africa, the Caribbean. Similarly one can discuss the Caribbean diaspora to England, Canada and France.

Middle Passage: The sea journey from Africa to the Caribbean which represents the temporal moment when the slaves were dislocated from Africa.

Negritude: A word coined by Aimé Césaire defining the qualities of the values of Black civilisation in the world. It provided a positive image of race for Black people. It was criticised for its essentialist racial approach.

Patois: French word for provincial dialect, sometimes loosely applied to anglophone Caribbean creoles in general.

1.6 QUESTIONS

Q. 1. How does Caribbean poetry reflect the region's experience of colonisation? Support your answer with examples.

Q. 2. Write a note on the poetry of Caribbean writers of Indian descent.

Q. 3. What were origins of the use of creole English in Caribbean poetry? Explain with reference to any **one** early twentieth century poet.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

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UNIT 2 DEREK WALCOTT - I

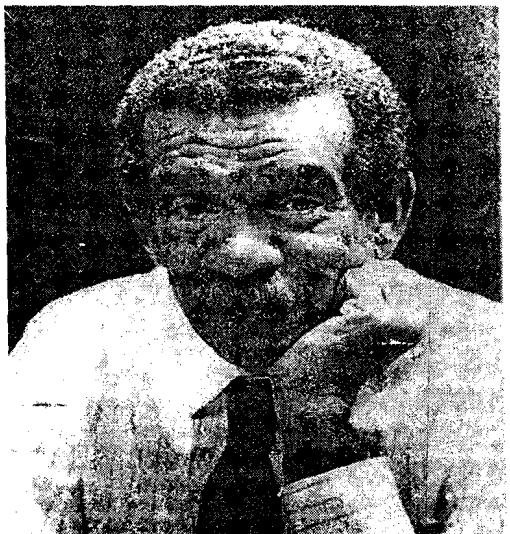
Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 St. Lucia
2.2 Derek Walcott
  2.2.1 Poet
  2.2.2 Painter
  2.2.3 Dramatist
2.3 Crusoe's Journal
  2.3.1 Literary Source/Post-colonial Re-source
  2.3.2 The Text
  2.3.3 Analysis
  2.3.4 Mimicry
2.4 Names
  2.4.1 A New World and a New Language
  2.4.2 The Text
  2.4.3 Analysis
  2.4.4 *Nommo*
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Questions
2.7 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are (a) to provide information about Derek Walcott's life and work as a poet, painter, dramatist and essayist, (b) to look at a representative selection of his poetry till 1980. The major themes and concerns of Walcott's poetry will be indicated through a detailed analysis of each of the poems included in this unit. You can begin by reading the poem and looking up the difficult words in the glossary accompanying it. Then read the poem along with its analysis. Finally think about how the poems reflect various aspects of Caribbean culture, what stance the poet has towards it, and how it is similar to or different from the poets discussed in the previous unit.

2.1 ST. LUCIA



Walcott was born in 1930 on the island of St. Lucia which is a member of the Eastern Caribbean Association formed after the collapse of the West Indian Federation in 1962. The island is on the Windward side of the Caribbean basin along with Grenada, Martinique, St. Vincent, Grenadines and Dominica. In the 1500s and 1600s Britain and France fought for control over these islands. The culture of St. Lucia reflects the duality of the colonial powers that contended for it for over 160 years. In 1804 the English acquired control but the French left their mark on the language and customs of the island which had a population of mainly Africans or part-Africans. The French influence is also visible in Roman Catholicism which is still the principal religion of the island. Most of the St. Lucian population is bilingual or even trilingual but more comfortable in French creole than in any other language. Walcott is of African and English parentage and has called his boyhood "schizophrenic." In an interview with Robert Hamner he said, "I have not only a dual racial personality but a dual linguistic personality. My real language, and tonally my basic language, is patois." Walcott's poetry reveals the interpenetration of languages: French creole, English creole, English and even European languages like Latin. As has been observed by commentators on Walcott's language, there are small examples of "West Indian vocabulary" placed in "a Standard English setting." Walcott has written about his "illegitimacy" in the West Indian tradition in his essay "What the Twilight Says: An Overture" ("WTS"). Here he calls himself "this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian" (10). His poetry reflects this hybridity both at the level of language as well as identity. The title of his poem on St. Lucia is "Sainte Lucie," the creolization indicating the exploration of language thematized in it. Similarly one of his early poems "A Far Cry from Africa" expresses this theme of an hybrid identity:

> I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
> Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
> I who have cursed
> The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
> Between this African and the English tongue I love?
> (*Collected Poems*, hereafter CP, 18)

When I discuss Walcott's poetry I will point out further elaborations on the theme of hybridity, a much discussed concept in post-colonial theory. One of these is the feeling of dis-location experienced by the individual who feels a sense of rootlessness in the culture of his/her origin. Walcott was born in St. Lucia, received "a sound colonial education" there, studied and worked in Jamaica and Trinidad for some time, but since the 1970s he has been teaching in the United States. However, the Caribbean and St. Lucia in particular continues to impress on his creative imagination. In his epic poem, *Omeros* (1990), modelled on Homer's *Odyssey*, he presents St. Lucia as "the Helen of the West Indies" because thirteen battles were fought for its control by rival colonial powers. And yet the poet feels a sense of dissociation from his island when he returns there. This is expressed in "The Light of the World" in which he represents St. Lucia by means of female figures, but as he passes from the town to the hotel he says it is full of "transients" like himself. St. Lucia's history, language and culture are constituents of the structure of feeling which informs Derek Walcott's multigeneric creativity. It is to the various aspects of this that I will now draw your attention.

2.2 DEREK WALCOTT

2.2.1 Poet

When Walcott was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992 the Swedish Academy made a special mention of his epic poem *Omeros*. Regarded as his *magnum opus* this poem transposes Homeric characters to a St. Lucian setting to make the epic reflect Caribbean reality. Walcott has never been reticent about

acknowledging that the major influences on his poetic career have been European and American. Among the poets he most enjoys reading are Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Edward Thomas. He admits to have written poems in the manner of Eliot and Auden at the beginning of his poetic career. That his acknowledgement of influence might lead to the charge of imitation or non-originality is a danger Walcott is well aware of. His self-confidence in such acknowledgements stems from what he calls a "tribal accent." He believes that people in many of the erstwhile colonies who "grow up speaking the English language" experience no "alienation" from it and hence their claim that the language belongs to them is justified. Imitation arises only when these speakers forget their "tribal accent" and try to speak in imitation of the accent of the original tongue. To this end he has never thought of himself as an English writer but has let native rhythms permeate his work so that it is not one particular writer which has influenced him but rather "Literature" in general (Brown and Johnson, 176-77). Walcott's early poetry is full of echoes from canonical texts of European lierature. This is especially evident in collections like *In A Green Night* (1962) where the title poem refers to Marvell, *The Castaway and Other Poems* (1965) and *The Gulf* (1970). In his later poetry the work of New World poets like St. John Perse from Gaudelope, Aimé Césaire from Martinique and Pablo Neruda from Chile is often acknowledged as providing poetic models. Walcott's friendship with contemporary poets like Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, Robert Lowell and Ted Hughes has also played a part in his poetic development. Through Brodsky he links himself to the Russian poet Mandelstam and through Lowell to the idea of America evinced in his later poetry.

I point out all these varied influences to counter Walcott's appropriation as an English poet in recent critical scholarship on the one hand and his dismissal on grounds of unoriginality on the other. Like T.S. Eliot's idea of tradition and the individual talent, Walcott's formulations about a poetic tradition emphasise its continuity: "The new poet enters a flux and withdraws, as the weaver continues the pattern, hand to hand and mouth to mouth, as the rock-pile convict passes the sledge" ("The Muse of History," henceforth "MH"). This last comparison between the poet and the convict links the exercise of the poetic craft to the idea of a continuity of enforced labour. The way Walcott perceives poetry it becomes a laborious exercise with the poet being chained to his craft much like a convict. Given the history of slavery and enforced labour in the Caribbean this seems to me a particularly apt metaphor for describing his postcolonial poetics.

2.2.2 Painter

Walcott's artistic development has been strongly imprinted by his father's work as a painter. Although Warwick Walcott died when Walcott was an infant, he left behind water colour paintings which, in the author's own words, "gave me a kind of impetus and a strong sense of continuity. I felt that what had been cut off in him somehow was an extension that I was continuing." For a long time Walcott veered between painting and poetry. He has continued painting over the years and has had important relationships with the painters Harry Simmons and Dunstan St. Omer, a childhood friend, to whom some of his poems are dedicated. In Chapter 9 of *Another Life* Walcott speaks of abandoning his painterly ambitions for poetry:

> I hoped that both disciplines might
> by painful accretion cohere
> and finally ignite,
> but I lived in a different gift,
> its element metaphor.

Nevertheless, as Rei Terada has observed, his poetry "often considers the arts' interrelations" and his poems "quietly merge the verbal with the visual" (119). The evanescence of both painting and poetry is a theme often expressed in his work. It is from his interest in the visual arts that the landscape descriptions in his poetry draw

their concreteness and detail. Visual extravagance in Caribbean art and literature is something he defends with reference to Greek art. According to him the Greek sculptures were painted very brightly unlike the bleached out quality they're now associated with: "All the purple and gold . . . is very Caribbean, that same vigor and elation of an earlier Greece, not a later Greece . . ." (Brown and Johnson 183). With such correspondences in mind it is easy to see why Walcott chose Homer's Greek epic as the model for his Caribbean epic *Omeros*.

2.2.3 Dramatist

In "What The Twilight Says: An Overture," the essay which forms the introduction to a selection of Walcott's early plays, he describes "two pale children" watching the drama being enacted on the streets from an upstairs window. Reading this account about how these children created their "little theatre" of men made from twigs it is easy to conceive how Derek and his twin brother Roderick Walcott grew up to be the most significant Caribbean playwrights of this century. In 1950 Walcott along with Maurice Mason founded the Arts Guild of St. Lucia. When he left the island to take up a scholarship at the University of West Indies the leadership of the Guild was taken over by Roderick. It was in Trinidad that Walcott's plays *The Sea at Dauphin* and *Henri Christophe* were first staged in the 1950s. In 1958 the highpoint of the celebrations to herald the inauguration of the West Indies Federation was an open air production of the epic drama written by Walcott titled *Drums and Colours*. In 1959 Walcott formed the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, one of the most influential groups working in theatre at that time. In his essays and interviews Walcott has described his twenty year struggle to form a professional theatre company and the sense of failure which he felt at its break up. The note of despondency is summed up succinctly in the statement: "In these new nations art is a luxury, and the theatre the most superfluous of amenities" ("WTS" 7).

Over the years many of Walcott's plays have drawn upon folklore for source material. In the fifties and sixties the plays *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* and *Dream on a Monkey Mountain* drew upon folk tales and legends. Versions of European classics include *The Joker of Seville* and an adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Walcott is an extremely prolific playwright whose plays have been performed all over the world. For many of his plays he draws upon the traditions of popular culture in the Caribbean specially the Carnival which has been called theatre on the streets. Coming from a region of the world where the theatre is all around "in the streets at lampfall in the kitchen doorway," it is no wonder that the region's most famous poet should also be its best known playwright.

2.3 CRUSOE'S JOURNAL

2.3.1 Literary Source/Post-colonial Resource

The title of this poem points at its literary source, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* published in 1791. The poem reworks the associations this literary character conjures with the aim of abrogating it for specifically voicing post-colonial concerns. You would remember that Defoe's novel is about a man shipwrecked on an island who, being the only survivor, fends for himself making the best use of what he can salvage from the wreck and of the resources available on the island. During the course of his long stay on the island he rescues a savage from cannibals whom he later names Friday. Friday becomes Crusoe's companion and servant on the island. I hope this outline has refreshed your memory of the text and you can see how the narrative can be read as being about colonisation. Crusoe is the discoverer and coloniser of the island, if only an unwilling one, since it is his misfortune to be stranded there. He longs for human company but in Friday he finds a savage whom he must civilize by teaching him the English language and Christian morality. The hierarchical relation between the two is reinforced by Friday calling Crusoe "Master."

Can you think of any other canonical English work which can also be interpreted in this manner? Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* immediately comes to my mind. In the play Prospero, the deposed duke of Milan cast adrift on a boat with his daughter Miranda, lands on a lonely island inhabited by the witch Sycorax who has kept spirits imprisoned. The witch's son Caliban is the sole inhabitant of the island when Prospero lands on it. With the aid of his magic Prospero frees the spirits and keeps Caliban in his service having taught him his language so that he can obey orders. Prospero's control over the island and its original inhabitants like Ariel and Caliban can be seen as another narrative of colonisation.

The similarity between these two examples of canonical texts which can be read in this way should be clear to you. Pay special attention to the fact that both Crusoe and Prospero teach their language to the savages they control.

Both *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest* have been subject to many such readings. In 1960 George Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile* dismantled the hierarchy of Prospero, Ariel and Caliban to see Caliban as a West Indian whose human status is negated by the European who denied him his inheritance. In 1969 Aimé Césaire reworked the play in an African context rewriting it in French (Ashcroft *et al* 189). Walcott's poetic rendition of the figure of Crusoe in this and other poems is one of the earliest re-readings of Defoe's classic text. It is useful to remember that Defoe based his story on the experiences of Alexander Selkirk. Selkirk was a member of a privateering expedition. Having quarrelled with his captain he asked to be put ashore on the island of Juan Fernandez in 1704. He remained on the island till 1709 when he was rescued by a ship. So the context of the original work is not unlinked to the mercenary motives of colonial enterprise. There have been other interpretations of Defoe's novel in recent times. In 1986 the South African novelist J.M. Coetzee published *Foe*, a fictional re-interpretation in which the narrator is a white, female castaway who tells her story to "Robinson Crusoe." It is later that the reader comes to know that the narrator is addressing her story to "Daniel Foe" so that he can write about it. The latter part of the novel is in the form of her journal. Coetzee chooses to write the novel from the point of a woman indicating the masculinist ethos of an adventure novel like Defoe's. Walcott's agenda in this poem seems to be to posit Crusoe as a New World Adam from whose journals "the language of a race" took its present form. The language is of course English but adapted to the surroundings Crusoe finds himself in. Through his journals it also becomes the language of those who succeed him. The post-colonial poetics is evident in Friday's claim to what was initially an imposed language.

2.3.2 The Text

Crusoe's Journal

> *I looked now upon the world as a thing remote, which I had nothing to do with, no expectation from, and, indeed, no desires about. In a word, I had nothing indeed to do with it, nor was ever like to have; so I thought it looked as we may perhaps look upon it hereafter, viz., as a place I had lived in but was come out of it; and well might I say, as Father Abraham to Dives, "Between me and thee is a great gulf fixed."*
> —**ROBINSON CRUSOE**

Once we have driven past Mundo Nuevo trace
        safely to this beach house
perched between ocean and green, churning forest
        the intellect appraises
objects surely, even the bare necessities
        of style are turned to use,

like those plain iron tools he salvages
from shipweck, hewing a prose
as odorous as raw wood to the adze;
out of such timbers
came our first book, our profane Genesis
whose Adam speaks that prose
which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself
with poetry's surprise,
in a green world, one without metaphors;
like Christofer he bears
in speech mnemonic as a missionary's
the Word to savages,
its shape an earthen, water-bearing vessel's
whose sprinkling alters us
into good Fridays who recite His praise,
parroting our master's
style and voice, we make his language ours,
converted cannibals
we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ.

All shapes, all objects multiplied from his,
our ocean's Proteus;
in childhood, his derelict's old age
was like a god's. (Now pass
in memory, in serene parentheis,
the cliff-deep leeward coast
of my own island filing past the noise
of stuttering canvas,
some noon-struck village, Choiseul, Canaries,
crouched crocodile canoes,
a savage settlement from Henty's novels,
Marryat or R.L.S.,
with one boy signalling at the sea's edge,
though what he cried is lost.)
So time, that makes us objects, multiplies
our natural loneliness.

For the hermetic skill, that from earth's clays
shapes something without use,
and, separate from itself, lives somewhere else,
sharing with every beach
a longing for those gulls that cloud the cays
with raw, mimetic cries,
never surrenders wholly, for it knows
it needs another's praise
like hoar, half-cracked Ben Gunn, until it cries
at last, "O happy desert!"
and learns again the self-creating peace
of islands. So from this house
that faces nothing but the sea, his journals
assume a household use;
we learn to shape from them, where nothing was
the language of a race,
and since the intellect demands its mask
that sun-cracked, bearded face
provides us with the wish to dramatize
ourselves at nature's cost,
to attempt a beard, to squint through the sea-haze,
posing as naturalists,
drunks, castaways, beachcombers, all of us

yearn for those fantasies
of innocence, for our faith's arrested phase
when the clear voice
startled itself saying "water, heaven, Christ,"
hoarding such heresies as
God's loneliness moves in His smallest creatures.

Glossary

hewing:	to chop or cut
odorous:	diffusing fragrance
adze:	tool for cutting away the surface of wood
Genesis:	first book of the Old Testament with an account of the Creation
Christofer:	Christopher Columbus
mnemonic:	designed to aid the memory
Proteus:	a minor sea-god in Homer's *Odyssey* who has the power to assume different shapes
derelict:	person abandoned by society
leeward:	towards the sheltered side
canoe:	slender wooden boat with pointed or open ends
Henty:	George Alfred Henty (1832-1902), a war correspondent most famous as the author of stories for boys mainly based on military history. The best remembered of these are *Out in the Pampas* (1868), *The Young Buglers* (1880), *Under Drake's Flag* (1883) and *With Clive in India* (1889).
Marryat:	Captain Frederick Marryat (1792-1848), a naval captain, wrote several novels of sea life among them *Midshipman Easy* (1836), most famous for his children's books especially *The Settlers in Canada* (1844) and *Children of the New Forest* (1847).
R.L.S.:	Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94). His first full length novel was *Treasure Island* (1883) followed by *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Also remembered for the popular Scottish romance *Kidnapped* (1886).
hermetic:	alchemical
cay:	insular bank or reef of coral, sand etc.
Ben Gunn:	a character in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, a marooned pirate who helps Jim and Squire Trelawney secure the treasure
beachcomber:	white man in the Pacific islands who lives by collecting goods thrown over-board from ships
heresy:	opinion contrary to the doctrine of the Christian Church

2.3.3 Analysis

The poem begins with an epigraph from *Robinson Crusoe* in which Crusoe articulates his feeling of alienation from the world. He experiences a disconnection

from it which he says might be comparable to what one experiences "hereafter," after death when one looks upon the transient world. It is the same feeling which is expressed by the poet in the first few lines. Keep in mind that the poem is from Walcott's 1965 collection *The Castwaway and Other Poems*. A comment made by Walcott explaining how he came to write the title poem of this collection is of relevance to "Crusoe's Journal" as well. He says he wrote "The Castaway" at a beach house in Trinidad where the "beaches . . . are generally very empty - just you, the sea and the vegetation around you." At that beach house, he conceived "an image of the West Indian artist as someone who was in a shipwrecked position" (Hirsch qtd. in Terada 158). This poem begins by mentioning a beach house located between the ocean and the forest. The image of the artist as situated between worlds is continued when the Crusoe-artist is shown as fashioning "a prose as odorous as raw wood." The craft of the carpenter and artist are brought together in the use of the word "timber," which literally means wood but has the same pronounciation as 'timbre,' denoting the characteristic quality of sounds. The word "green" repeated twice in the first stanza indicates both the uncorrupted Edenic vitality of the island where Crusoe was shipwrecked and also the fresh, uncliched language he uses, "one without metaphors." Three figures are brought together in this stanza: the literary (Robinson Crusoe), the Biblical/mythological (Adam) and the historical (Christopher Columbus). Linking them is their use of language. Crusoe is the New World Adam who, like the Biblical Adam, names his surroundings. He is also like "Christofer" (Walcott uses the creolized version of his name) inasmuch as he attempts to Christianize his servant Friday, the "converted cannibal." The Biblical echoes in the last line of the stanza are skillfully woven in: "Word" is the word of God as well as language in general; the savage sprinkled with water is baptized but sprinkling with a few drops of water can also mean granting a limited knowledge of the language; "good Fridays" indicates obedient servants but it is also the Friday before Easter commemorating the crucifixion; and finally towards the end Christianity is presented as a cannibalistic religion as the phrase "eat the flesh" indicates. The varied aspects of Crusoe's personality - he is at once a castaway, a discoverer, a coloniser, a linguist and a missionary - delineated by the poet in the previous stanza make him Protean. It is this ability to assume various shapes, almost like a god, which is so fascinating to the poet in his childhood. A child's fascination with literary characters and situations is concretised in the middle of the poem by mentioning the names of famous nineteenth century writers of adventure tales for children. Henty, Marryat and Stevenson all wrote works which have become classics of children's literature. That the poet is remembering the incidents read in his childhood is stylistically indicated through the use of parentheses. The sense of awe and wonder at "savage settelement[s]" and "crouched crocodile canoes" is evident in the obvious alliteration, that it is also bracketed off makes it a long forgotten sensation. The boy standing at the edge of the sea is a mental image of childhood, the words "what he cried is lost" indicate that it is an incomplete image. It is a Wordsworthian reminiscence specially in terms of the contrast set up between the "stuttering" past and the "serene" present. And this serenity is not an unmixed blessing for since his boyhood days there has been a multiplication of the poet's loneliness. Notice once more how the poetic persona and his Crusoe mask came together in the phrase "natural loneliness" which indicates that alienation is both inherent as well as circumstantial, as in the case of Crusoe when nature, in a sense, conspired to his being the lone survivor of a shipwreck.

This conjunction is continued in the last stanza of the poem where the poet's craft of shaping poetry from the clay of language is called "hermetic." The word carries associations of magic as well as insularity. The image of shaping vessels from clay is carried over from the first stanza where "earthern, water-bearing vessel[s]" are mentioned. Thinking back on *Robinson Crusoe* I am reminded of the incident in it when Crusoe tries to make vessels from clay, first unsuccessfully and then later, by accident, successfully. Again relating the poetic craft to that of the humble potter the poet labels it as "something without use." In him the desire for isolation contends with an opposing need for recognition, "another's praise." Ben Gunn, the pirate who was deserted by his crew in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, is an apt figure for

concretising these paradoxical desires. The dangers of isolation are pointed out through the phrase "half-cracked." While solitude and "peace" is essential for creativity, too much of it can lead to mental imbalance. The appropriation of Crusoe's language by Friday, the savage, leads to the shaping of the "language of a race." Crusoe's journal, the repository of the script, is the main source of the language the colonised take over and make their own. It is also suggested that Crusoe is just a personification of man's desire for self-dramatization, a boyhood or adolescent fantasy untenable in the real world. In contrast to the questioning faith of childhood, adult life is marked with alienation so that it (alienation) is seen as a part of all God's creations. The transference of a personal experience to all of God's creatures is a "heresy" the poetic persona is acutely conscious of.

2.3.4 Mimicry

Now that I have analysed the poem I want you to notice its structure and to make interrelations between its form and content. Notice that each of the three stanzas consists of long lines alternating with short lines. Each stanza comprises one long sentence with clauses and the end of the sentence also marks the end of the stanza. The first and last stanzas posit the person's identification with both Crusoe and Friday, whereas the second consists of boyhood reminiscences. Walcott's poetics of affiliation make him identify the poetic persona with both the coloniser and the colonised, Crusoe and Friday. This probably explains the alternation of long and short lines, Friday "learns to shape" the language so that presumably the structure of the poem visually enacts this learning process indicated by the shorter lines. But do not forget that the shorter lines are enclosed within the longer sentence comprising the stanza, suggesting, in my view, that if Friday learns from Crusoe, the latter's language too is inflected with the former's. The poet envies the "raw, mimetic cries" of the gulls on the beach, the word "mimetic" should alert you to the fact that from one perspective Friday's language of the race, which is also the poet's, can be dismissed as colonial mimicry. Walcott counters this idea in his essay "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" by writing: "When language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes" (7). Go back to the lines in which the poet hears the gulls and you will notice that there is a longing for mimesis expressed there. As Terada has pointed out mimicry is a survival and evolutionary technique and hence has anthropologically positive connotations (23). Walcott's most thorough debunking of the notions of originality and mimicry occurs in his play *Pantomime* (1978) where the black servant Jackson Phillip and his white master Harry Trewe each play the role of both Friday and Crusoe. By underscoring the effects of the written word through the mention of adventure novels by Henty, Marryat, Stevenson and Crusoe's journal, Walcott reinterprets the binary opposition between speech/writing, original/mimesis. Friday and the poet fashion their language from the written word, hence if they can be accused of mimicry it is not of the original but of something which is itself a representation or mimesis.

2.4 NAMES

2.4.1 A New World and a New Language

The arbitrariness of language in a New World setting is a commonplace in religious, literary and theoretical discourse. I use the phrase "New World" not only in the specific sense of the American continent, as I have done so far, but also to refer to the newly created world mentioned in Genesis and its literary elucidation in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). *Genesis* begins with an account of the Creation of the world and man. Chapter 2 v.19 describes how God leaves it to Adam to name the birds and the beasts: "and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof." You can see for yourself that no reason is given for assigning a particular name to a particular creature, the whimsicality of Adam seems to underlie the

important task of nomenclature which can be said to be the first step towards the development of language. Adam's first words are nouns but the *Genesis* does not specify whether these bear resemblance to the creatures or objects they denote. Milton gives an account of Creation as narrated to Adam by the angel Raphael in Book VII of *Paradise Lost*. Raphael lists the beasts, birds and insects created by God and then tells Adam: "thou the Natures know'st, and gav'st them Names." The link between nomenclature and the object to be named is clearly not arbitrary here, the nouns have a basis in the "Natures" or attributes of the creatures. Observe how a new world necessitates the invention of a new language but that the connection between the two parts of a linguistic sign - the 'signifier' (a spoken or written mark) and the 'signified' (what is thought when the mark is made) - may not be either apparent or present. The problem is intensified when both the world and the language is new as was the case with all those who arrived to the Caribbean under the system of slavery or near-forced labour like the Africans and later the Indians and the Chinese. The Crusoe and Caliban paradigms cannot be rigorously applied here because out of language and world, both figures possess one familiar entity. Crusoe found himself in a new world but had his language to express its reality, Caliban experienced imposition of a new language but his surroundings were familiar to him. As far as Africans being brought to the New World are concerned, both language and surroundings were alien and hence it was inevitable that they could perceive no connection between the signifer and the signified. It is the disorientation resulting from this which Walcott highlights in this poem.

2.4.2 The Text

Names

[*for Edward Brathwaite*]

I
My race began as the sea began,
with no nouns, and with no horizon,
with pebbles under my tongue,
with a different fix on the stars.

But now my race is here,
in the sad oil of Levantine eyes,
in the flags of the Indian fields.

I began with no memory,
I began with no future,
but I looked for that moment
when the mind was halved by a horizon.

I have never found that moment
when the mind was halved by a horizon—
for the goldsmith from Benares,
the stonecutter from Canton,
as a fishline sinks, the horizon
sinks in the memory.

Have we melted into a mirror,
leaving our souls behind?
The goldsmith from Benares,
the stonecutter from Canton,
the bronzesmith from Benin.

A sea-eagle screams from the rock,
and my race began like the osprey
with that cry

that terrible vowel
that I!
Behind us all the sky folded,
as history folds over a fishline,
and the foam foreclosed
with nothing in our hands

but this stick
to trace our names on the sand
which the sea erased again, to our indifference.

II

And when they named these bays
bays,
was it nostalgia or irony?

In the uncombed forest,
in uncultivated grass
where was there elegance
except in their mockery?

Where were the courts of Castille?
Versailles' colonnades
supplanted by cabbage palms
with Corinthian crests,
belittling diminutives,
then, little Versailles
meant plans for a pigsty,
names for the sour apples
and green grapes
of their exile.

Their memory turned acid
but the names held;
Valencia glows
with the lanterns of oranges,
Mayaro's
charred candelabra of cocoa.
Being men, they could not live
except they first presumed
the right of every thing to be a noun.
The African acquiesced,
repeated, and changed them.

Listen, my children, say:
moubain: the hogplum,
cerise: the wild cherry,
baie-la: the bay,
with the fresh green voices
they were once themselves
in the way the wind bends
our natural inflections.

These palms are greater than Versailles,
for no man made them,
their fallen columns greater than Castille,
no man unmade them
except the worm, who has no helmet,
but was always the emperor,

and children, look at these stars
over Valencia's forest!

Not Orion,
not betelgeuse,
tell me, what do they look like?
Answer, you damned little Arabs!
Sir, fireflies caught in molasses.

Glossary

fix:	position found by astronomical observations
Levantine:	inhabitant of Levant, countries belonging to the Eastern part of Mediterranean like Morocco
Benares:	a holy city on the banks of the Ganges in India
Canton:	a province in China
Benin:	a small West African country
sea-eagle:	a kind of fishing eagle
osprey:	a large bird preying on fish, also called the fishing eagle or sea-hawk
bay:	a bark or howl; part of sea filling a wide mouthed opening of land; kind of wreath worn by conquerors or poets. All three meanings applicable in this context.
Castille:	Spain
Versailles:	a city in France
colonnades:	series of columns
Corinthian:	Greek style of architecture having a bell shaped capital with rows of leaves
cabbage palms:	a lofty palm with a cylindrical trunk and a large crown of fronds
Valencia:	a province of Spain
candelabra:	branched candlestick or lampstand
acquiesced:	agreed
***moubain, cerise, baie-la*:**	French creole words whose English equivalents Walcott provides in the poem
Orion, Betelgeuse:	names of constellations

2.4.3 Analysis

The lack of both a language and a point of cultural origin due to the enslavement of the African people are seen by the poet as negating the linear view of history. In this sense the sea, a seemingly endless expanse of water with no beginning or end in sight, is an apt metaphor for the flux of the non-linearity of history. Behind this idea is Heraclitus's comparison of the flux of time to the flowing of a river. The comparison with the sea is extended and developed in the first few lines of the poem specially with the idea of "pebbles under . . . [the] tongue" and "a different fix on stars." The rocks under the surface of an apparently transparent sea can be compared to coercion underlying the use of colonial languages by the slaves. The nature of perceived reality also suffers an enforced change much like the alteration of the position of the stars depending upon the point from which they are observed. A

drastic alteration effected in both language and reality arose out of the journey across the Middle Passage and culminated in the arrival "here," the Caribbean. The sadness in the eyes of those brought from Morocco or those who came from India attests to the sense of deprivation felt by them. The word "horizon," reiterated continuously in the first part of the poem is the object of search. If taken to mean the point of cultural or historical beginning then the "mind halved by a horizon" would be that of a schizophrenic, one marked by disconnection between thought, feelings and actions. As the goldsmith from Benares or stone-cutter from Canton become accustomed to the colonial servitude, which demands from them not their traditional skills but those of the unskilled labourer, the schizoid tendencies disappear, "the horizon sinks in the memory." When men are looked upon as mere labour it is a degradation of their humanity for they are important only for their physical attributes or mirror image, the soul ceases to be of any consequence. The traditional crafts they were engaged in (that of the goldsmith, stonecutter and bronzesmith) required a spiritual as well as physical effort, but only the latter is demanded of them in the New World. The language corresponding to such a situation can only be one of anguish, a scream or a cry. The nature-culture opposition is emphasised and resolved in the beginning of language with the cry of a bird. Language does not refer to the reality outside, its only referent is the individual, "that I," whose anguish it reflects. Correspondences between the sea and history which Walcott explicates movingly in a later poem "The Sea is History" are anticipated in the concluding lines of the first section of "Names." Dispossession leaves the poet's race with "nothing in . . . [their] hands," the historical erasure of their suffering is here emblematised as the sea erasing the names on the sand. This image has its literary antecedents in Spenser's *Amoretti*: "I wrote her name upon the strand," where it is used to depict the evanescence of love and beauty. The difference in the context of the usage serves to highlight the irony inherent in its use.

After having outlined the historical imperatives Walcott turns to linguistic ones. The second part of the poem begins with a questioning of the interrelationship between the signifier and the signified in the sign "bays," a word which has multiple meanings. The emotion underlying this nomenclature could be "nostalgia" for power and glory which the colonisers tried to re-enact in the New World, if the word is taken to mean the wreath of bay leaves worn by conquerors. But two other meanings of the word - a bark or howl and a part of the sea filling in an opening in the land - could also have been implied in an ironical usage. The howl of the slave and the roar of the sea would testify to the glory of the colonisers at the same time as it would be an ironic reminder to the slaves of their misery. The elegance invested in the language is, according to the poet, not reflective of the surroundings and hence constitutes "mockery." Examples of this mockery include speaking of the New World in terms borrowed from the Old World which carry the grandeur associated with its civilizational accomplishments like art and architecture. Thus the cabbage palms are compared to Versailles' collonades, for nature provides the architecture of this world. The fronds on the palms are equated with rows of acanthus leaves on corinthian pillars. When the name of a city like Versailles is applied to a pigsty the poet thinks that it is the exiles' revenge for being forced to leave Europe. Walcott is here delineating the factors governing the Europeans' use of language just as he had in the previous section discussed the historical conditions which led to its imposition on others. Most of the white population in the Caribbean is descended from convicts for whom the region was at once a haven as well as exile. Probably this is the reason for their dissatisfaction which the poet indicates by the phrases "sour apples" and "green grapes." The other markers of the world they have left behind, as reflected in the varied means of lighting (lanterns and candelbra), are to be found as oranges and cocoa, much like the colonnades being cabbage palms.

Nouns are the primary markers of identification in the object world and the beginning of language. That the African transformed this language is indicated in the poem by means of what is called "internal translation." The poetic persona in the concluding section of the poem is that of a school-teacher teaching the children nouns, names of

fruits and trees found in the Caribbean. The teacher gives the creole names and then explains them by their English equivalents. He rejects the received ways of pronounciation when he asks the children to utter the names "with fresh green voices" and "our natural inflections." In my introduction to Walcott's poetry at the beginning of this unit I had referred to Walcott's idea of the "tribal accent," the teacher is here asking the students to speak the language with their own and not received notions of the tribal accent. The pronunciation is one of the ways in which Africans "changed" the language imposed on them. A direct correlation is established between language and reality, culture and nature. Whereas the Europeans value their linguistic and cultural supremacy, the Caribbean school teacher in the poem overturns the hierarchy which places culture above nature to say that "These palms are *greater* than Versailles," "their fallen columns *greater* than Castille" (emphasis added). The superiority of nature's handiwork is proved by the "worm," signifying the destructibility of all objects. Towards the end of the poem he asks the children to describe the stars, forbidding them to use the names given to constellations. The children's answer that the stars look like "fireflies caught in molasses" is a perfect example of the correspondence between language and nature which the teacher had sought to establish. Molasses is made from sugarcane which along with bananas is one of the principal crops of the Caribbean. The sticky, sweet molasses often attract insects like fireflies. The descriptions draws on the Caribbean reality and hence constitutes a re-naming of the constellations.

2.4.4 *Nommo*

The poem I have just analysed is divided into two parts. To make further discussion on it comprehensible I will call these parts "historical" and "linguistic." The cultural critic who has most comprehensively explored the connections between history and language in the Caribbean is Edward Brathwaite to whom Walcott dedicates this poem. In *Contradictory Omens* (1974) Brathwaite wrote about the repressive conditions making up the history of the Afro-Caribbeans. From within an oppressive system these people "have been able to survive, adapt, recreate . . . and begin to offer to return some of this experience and vision." Re-naming is one of the modes of adaptation and recreation in which language is made to correspond to perceived reality. Brathwaite has further explicated this concept as that of the *nommo* which means the word or name, held to contain secret power. As he says, "[the] way of using the word depends very much upon an understanding of the folk tradition out of which it comes" (*Roots* 241). In this context the folk tradition is the creolization of language and Walcott has foregrounded this by giving, in the first part of the poem, the historical background to linguistic and cultural creolization, a method Brathwaite followed in his pathbreaking *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* (1970). One interesting feature of the poem is the shift in the person and number of the pronouns used. The poem begins with the use of the first person possessive pronoun "My race" and then moves to the first person singular "I", then the plural "we," which is continued in the "our" with which the first section ends. The poet claims both to speak of his race and for it. In the second part the third person plural pronoun "they" is used for the Europeans, towards the end there is a return to the first person form of address. Terada is of the opinion that this echoes the poem's theme but she does not provide a convincing explanation of this (98). In my opinion the multiplicity of pronouns used attests to the different persona the poet adopts in the poem: a poet (who gives poetic form to African history); a member of the African race; a member of the various Asian communities (Indian, Chinese); a commentator on the linguistic excesses of the Europeans; and finally a school teacher teaching students the correct approach to language. These are all "names" which can be given to a persona who in himself embodies all the different races who have contributed to the linguistic hybridity of the Caribbean. Finally the poem is a tribute to Brathwaite, who through his writings has done the most to have this hybridity recognised as "nation language" and not dismissed as dialect or patois.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Walcott spent his childhood and some part of his adult life in St. Lucia where he received a "sound colonial education" familiarising him with Western culture. This explains the commonly found references to Western art, culture and literature in his work. But that the Caribbean reality is also deeply impressed on his creative imagination is indicated by his view of nature as constituting the history and civilization of these islands. This is briefly touched upon in his poem "Names" but elaborated fully in "The Sea is History":

> Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
> Where is your tribal memory? sirs,
> in that grey vault. The sea, the sea
> has locked them up. The sea is History. (*CP* 364)

Refusing to adopt a stand of "recrimination and despair" or one of "remorse" towards history he prefers "a truly tough aesthetic of the New World [which] neither explains nor forgives history" ("MH" 39). This is apparent in poems like "Crusoe's Journal" where the poet aligns himself both with Crusoe the coloniser and Friday the colonised. Reworking canonical literary characters like Crusoe for a specifically post-colonial agenda on the language politics in the Caribbean is a technique used quite often in Walcott's early poetry. The multilingual heritage of the Caribbean and its multicultural society are reflected in Walcott's poetry not only through the different poetic persons but also in poems like "The Saddhu of couva" and "Nights in the Gardens of Port of Spain." The enforced migrations of people which gave this society its multicultural identity is remembered in "A Far Cry From Africa," and the plantation system which was sustained by it in "Ruins of a Great House." In the latter poem Walcott's stand on history outlined in "The Muse of History" is presented in poetic idiom:

> Ablaze with rage I thought,
> Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake,
> But still the coal of my compassion fought
> That Albion too was once
> A colony like ours . . . (*CP* 20)

While this stand can be read as pacifist and liberal humanist I hope to show in the next unit that this would be a ridiculously simplistic view of Walcott's poetic ideology.

2.6 QUESTIONS

Q1. To what end are literary characters re-worked in post-colonial literature? Discuss with detailed reference to one of Walcott's poems.

Q2. The structure of Walcott's poetry reflects the theme. Elaborate on this statement giving examples from two poems.

Q3. Write a critical account of the relationship between history and language in Walcott's poetry.

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

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-- "What the Twilight Says: An Overture." *Dream on a Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1972. 3-40.

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UNIT 3 DEREK WALCOTT - II

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 The Traveller
3.2 The Spoiler's Return
  3.2.1 The Cutting Edge of Satire
  3.2.2 The Text
  3.2.3 Analysis
  3.2.4 Carnival
3.3 From *Midsummer*
  3.3.1 Poetry as Autobiography
  3.3.2 The Text
  3.3.3 Analysis
  3.3.4 Imagi/nation
3.4 From *Omeros*
  3.4.1 Cultural Translation
  3.4.2 The Text
  3.4.3 Analysis
  3.4.4 Epic Re-vers[e]ions
3.5 Let Us Sum Up
3.6 Questions
3.7 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to discuss Walcott's poetry published in the 1980s and 1990s. In doing so I shall touch upon various aspects of Caribbean culture and society which Walcott has incorporated to a much greater extent in his later work. The poems to be discussed are from his collections *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981), *Midsummer* (1984) and *Omeros* (1990). It is absolutely essential for you to have read carefully the poems discussed at length in the previous unit and the extracts from other poems. This will help you in noting for yourself the differences between Walcott's early and later poetry.

3.1 THE TRAVELLER

Since the 1970s Walcott has divided his time between the Caribbean and the United States. He has taught at Yale, Columbia, Boston and other universities. The title of his 1981 collection of poetry *The Fortunate Traveller* indicates this movement between two regions and cultures and the poems reflect the diasporic or exilic perspective. In "The Hotel Normandie Pool" he writes, "corruption, censorship and arrogance/make exile seem a happier thought than home" (*CP* 442). However it is not as if the condition of exile is an unmixed blessing. In interviews Walcott has acknowledged, that contained in the exile's physical separation from the place of origin, is "this physical nostalgia for simple things like warm sea, sun, a certain kind of food" (White 157). Linking the art of poetry to the idea of heaven which posits that we are in exile from a place to which we really belong, Walcott calls poetry "a situation of divine discontent" (White 158). The exile's discontent can take as its reference point both the place of origin as well as the place of present abode. Walcott is aware of the haunting, abiding presence of racism in America. The title poem of his collection *The Arkansas Testament* (1977) explores this issue in detail. Since 1990 Walcott has been teaching creative writing at Boston University. He has called Boston the "toughest city in terms of Black fear" explaining that there is a fear of using Blacks in the theatre of this town. Aware of the problems of both the regions

between which he divides his time, Walcott is, in a sense, like his literary creation Shabine, the "red nigger" from "The Schooner *Flight*" who "had no nation now but the imagination" (*CP* 350). And yet, paradoxically, "the effort to create a nation as if it were an act of imagination" is present in Walcott's later poetry along with the distancing which arises out of his status as an exile (White 90).

3.2 THE SPOILER'S RETURN

3.2.1 The Cutting Edge of Satire

Walcott's engagement with and distanciation from the Caribbean is suggested in this poem through the persona of Spoiler, a calypsonian, who has come back from hell to visit Trinidad by special permission of his master Satan. The identification of Spoiler as a calypsonian immediately places him in the satirical tradition for the calypso is a popular satirical song in rhymed verse. Cultural critics locate the calypso's origin at the time of French settlement of Trinidad in the 18th century as songs sung in praise of a master or beration for his enemies. At the beginning of the twentieth century calypsos sung by masquerade bands became a part of formally organised carnival competitions. The first calypso competition was arranged in 1914. In it the competitors sought to outdo each other in wit and rhyme. Errol Hill who has researched the form and function of the calypso in his book on the Trinidad carnival calls it "an instrument of social criticism" and "an escape measure for resentful public feelings." He has also pointed out that one of the earliest surviving calypsoes in the English language is levelled at a 19th century British governor Sir Hubert Jermingham. Spoiler's criticism of opportunist politicians, profiteers and bureaucrats is in keeping with this satirical tradition.

The other satirical tradition invoked in the poem is Western. Spoiler asks the Roman satirists Juvenal and Martial to "back me up." These satirists worked in the epigrammatic style which in its pithiness is quite similar to the succinctness of calypso couplets. Their evocation of Roman life, criticism of fortune-hunters, gluttons, drunkards, debauchers and sympathy for the poor is comparable to Spoiler's picture of contemporary Trinidad. He also places himself in the line of English satirists from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Rochester, Dryden, Pope, Swift, Byron whom he labels "lords of irony" are visualised as contenders in Satan's "tent." The allusion is to calypso tents during carnival where competitions were held and in which a small fee was charged for admission. Walcott brings together the Trinidadian and Western forms of satire by making the Roman and English satirists competitors in a calypso tent. I want to bring to your attention the fact that there are two forms of satire mentioned in the poem: the calypso which as an expression of popular culture can be called a part of 'the little tradition,' and literary satire which can be seen as comprising 'the great tradition.' Such a hierarchical division would entail denigrating the calypso, which is primarily oral, below the Western mode of satire as literature. Spoiler's and Walcott's attack on contemporary Trinidad is double edged in its use of both oral and literary resources. This enables the poem, which is after all in print, to be seen as "orature," literature inscribed with orality.

3.2.2 The Text

The Spoiler's return

[*for Earl Lovelace*]

I sit high on this bridge in Laventille,
watching that city where I left no will
but my own conscience and rum-eaten wit,
and limers passing see me where I sit,
ghost in brown gabardine, bones in a sack,

and bawl: "Ay, Spoiler, boy! When you come back?"
and those who bold don't feel they out of place
to peel my limeskin back, and see a face
with eyes as cold as a dead macajuel,
and if they still can talk, I answer:"Hell."
I have a room there where I keep a crown,
and Satan send me to check out this town.
Down there, that Hot Boy have a stereo
where, whole day, he does blast my caiso;
I beg him two weeks' leave and he send me
back up, not as no bedbug or no flea,
but in this limeskin hag and floccy suit, '
to sing what I did always sing: the truth.
Tell Desperadoes when you reach the hill,
I decompose, but I composing still:

I going to bite them young ladies, partner,
like a hot dog or a hamburger
and if you thin, don't be in a fright
is only big fat women I going to bite.

The shark, racing the shadow of the shark
across clear coral rocks, does make them dark--
that is my premonition of the scene
of what passing over this Caribbean.
Is crab climbing crab-back, in a crab-quarrel
and going round and round in the same barrel,
is sharks with shirt-jacs, sharks with well-pressed fins,
ripping we small-fry off with razor grins;
nothing ain't change but colour and attire,
so back me up, Old Brigade of Satire,
back me up, Martial, Juvenal, and Pope
(to hang theirself I giving plenty rope),
join Spoiler' chorus, sing the song with me,
Laord Rochester, who praised the nimble flea:

Were I, who to my cost already am
One of those strange, prodigious creatures, Man,
A spirit free, to choose for my own share,
What case of flesh and blood I pleased to wear,
I hope when I die, after burial,
To come back as an insect or animal.

I see these islands and I feel to bawl,
"area of darkness" with V.S. Nightfall.

Lock off your tears, you casting pearls of grief
on a duck's back a waxen dasheen leaf,
the slime crab's carapace is waterproof
and those with hearing aids turn off the truth,
and their dark glasses let you criticize
your own presumptuous image in their eyes.
Behind dark glasses is just hollow skull,
and black still poor, though black is beautiful.
So, crown and mitre me Bedbug the First--
the gift of mockery with which I'm cursed
is just a insect biting Fame behind,
a vermin swimming in a glass of wine,

that, dipped out with a finger, bound to bite
its saving host, ungrateful parasite,
whose sting, between the cleft arse and its seat,
reminds Authority man is just meat,
a moralist as mordant as the louse
that the good husband brings from the whorehouse
the flea whose itch to make all Power wince,
will crash a fete, even at his life's expense,
and these pile up in lime pits by the heap,
daily; that our deliverers may sleep.
All those who promise free and just debate,
then blow up radicals to save the state,
who allow, in democracy's defence,
a parliament of spiked heads on a fence,
all you go bawl out, "Spoils, things ain't so bad."
This ain't the Dark Age, is just Trinidad,
is human nature, Spoiler, after all,
it ain't big genocide, is just bohbohl;
safe and conservative, 'fraid to take side,
they say that Rodney commit suicide,
is the same voices that, in the slave ship,
smile at their brothers, "Boy, is just the whip,"
I free and easy, you see me have chain?
A little censorship can't cause no pain,
a little graft can't rot the human mind,
what sweet in goat-mouth sour in his behind.
So I sing with Attila, I sing with Commander,
what right in Guyana, right in Uganda.
The time could come, it can't be very long,
when they will jail calypso for picong,
for first comes television, then the press,
all in the name of Civic Righteousness;
it has been done before, all Power has
made the sky shit and maggots of the stars,
over these Romans lying on their backs,
the hookers swaying their enormous sacks,
until all language stinks, and the truth lies,
a mass for maggots and a fete for flies;
and, for a spineless thing, rumour can twist
into a style the local journalist---
as bland as a green coconut, his manner
routinely tart, his sources the Savannah
and all pretensions to a native art
reduced to giggles at the coconut cart,
where heads with reputations, in one slice ,
are brought to earth, when they ain't eating nice;
and as for local Art, so it does go,
the audience have more talent than the show.

Is Carnival, straight Carnival that's all,
the beat is base, the melody bohbohl,
all Port of Spain is a twelve-thirty show,
some playing Kojak, some Fidel Castro,
some Rastamen, but, with or without locks,
to Spoiler is the same old khaki socks,
all Frederick Street stinkiing like a closed drain,

Hell is a city much like Port of Spain,
what the rain rots, the sun ripens some more,
all in the due process and within the law,

as, like a sailor on a spending spree,
we blow our oil-bloated economy
on projects from here to eternity,
and Lord, the sunlit streets break Spoiler's heart,
to have natural gas and not to give a fart,
to see them line up, pitch-oil tin in hand:
each independent, oil-forsaken island,
like jeering at some scrunter with the blues,
while you lend him some need-a-half-sole shoes,
some begging bold as brass, some coming meeker,
but from Jamaica to poor Dominica
we make them know they begging, every loan
we send them is like blood squeezed out of stone,
and giving gives us back the right to laugh
that we couldn't see we own black people starve,
and, more we give, more we congratulate
we-self on our own self-sufficient state.
In all them project, all them Five-Year Plan,
what happen to the Brotherhood of Man?
Around the time I dead it wasn't so,
we sang the Commonwealth of caiso,
we was in chains, but chains made us unite,
now who have, good for them, and who blight, blight;
my bread is bitterness, my wine is gall,
my chorus is the same: "I want to fall."
Oh, wheel of industry, check out your cogs!
Between the knee-high trash and khaki dogs
Arnold's Phoenician trader reach this far,
selling you half-dead batteries for your car;
the children of Tagore, in funeral shroud,
curry favour and chicken from the crowd;
as for the Creoles, check their house, and look,
you bust your brain before you find a book,
when Spoiler see all this, ain't he must bawl,
"area of darkness," with V.S. Nightfall?
Corbeaux like cardinals line the La Basse
in ecumenical patience while you pass
the Beetham Highway-Guard corruption's stench,
you bald, black justices of the High Bench-
and beyond them the firelit mangrove swamps,
ibises practising for postage stamps,
Lord, let me take a taxi South again
and hear, drumming across Caroni Plain,
the table in the Indian half hour
when twilight fills the mud huts of the poor,
to hear the tattered flags of drying corn
rattle a sky from which all the gods gone,
their bleached flags of distress waving to me
from shacks, adrift like rafts on a green sea,
"Things ain't go change, they ain't go change at all,"
to my old chorus: "Lord, I want to bawl."
The poor still poor, whatever arse they catch.
Look south from Laventille, and you can watch
the torn brown patches of the Central Plain
slowly restitched by needles of the rain,
and the frayed earth, crisscrossed like old bagasse,
spring to a cushiony quilt of emerald grass,
and who does sew and sow and patch the land?
The Indian. And whose villages turn sand?

The fishermen doomed to stitching the huge net
of the torn foam from Point to La Fillette.

One thing with hell, at least it organize
in soaring circles, when any man dies
he must pass through them first, that is the style,
Jesus was down here for a little while,
cadaverous Dante, big-guts Rabelais,
all of them wave to Spoiler on their way.
Catch us in Satan tent, next carnival:
Lord Rochester, Quevedo, Juvenal,
Maestro, Martial, Pope, Dryden, Swift, Lord Byron,
the lords of irony, the Duke of Iron,
hotly contending for the monarchy
in couplets or the old re-minor key,
all those who gave earth's pompous carnival
fatigue, and groaned "O God, I feel to fall!"
all those whose anger for the poor on earth
made them weep with a laughter beyond mirth,
names wide as oceans when compared with mine
salted my songs, and gave me their high sign.
All you excuse me, Spoiler was in town;
you pass him straight, so now he gone back down.

Glossary

limers:	an idler standing at a public place
gabardine:	a kind of cloth used for making suits
limeskin:	an old felt hat that has lost its shape
macajuel:	a large snake also called a boa - constrictor or anaconda
caiso:	alternative spelling for calypso, a popular satirical song in rhymed verse, often performed by a male singer with body gestures
floccy:	made of wool
Desperadoes:	person of reckless or criminal undertakings
crab-quarrel:	fight with the intention of pulling the other down
shirt-jacs:	loose-fitting, shirt-like garment, worn on official occasions
rip off:	defraud
small-fry:	inconsequential people
Martial:	Roman poet of the first century A.D., especially famous for his work *Epigrams* which satirize diverse characters of contemporary Rome.
Juvenal:	Second century Roman satirist, author of *Satires*, characterised by bitter invective and grim epigrams.

Rochester: John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1647-80), lyric poet and satirist. One of the first Augustans to write social and literary verse satires. The poem contains a quotation from his "Satyre on Mankind."

"area of darkness,": V.S. Nightfall V.S. Naipaul wrote a highly controversial novel about India titled *An Area of Darkness* (1964).

Lock off: choke back or stop

dasheen: a large tuber with big, heart-shaped leaves

carapace: shell

mitre: Bishop or abbot's tall cap, a symbol of episcopal office

mordant: caustic or biting

louse, flea: small parasitic insects

crash a fété: interrupt a party or a public dance

lime pits: for steeping hides to remove hair

Dark Age: 5th to 10th cent. A.D., the period preceding the Middle Ages was known as the Dark Ages, a period of unenlightenment.

genocide: deliberate extermination of people

bohbohl: to steal company or public funds

Rodney: probably Walter Rodney, a radical Guyanese lecturer and writer whose deportation from Jamaica in 1968 sparked off a massive student demonstration which was taken over by the general public and ended in violent clashes with the police.

goat-mouth: ability to cause minor misfortune by predicting the future, also called bad mouth

Atilla, Commander: stage names of famous calypsonians

picong: spontaneous verbal battle in rhymed song between two or more contending calypsonians

hookers: small fishing boats

Carnival: the massive, nationally organised festival of competitive, constumed street-dancing, calypso singing held usually in the last four days before Ash Wednesday.

tart: sharp, cutting

Rastamen:	members of the Rastafari cult, developed in Jamaica, believing Ethiopia to be the ultimate home of all Black people and the Western society as a survival of the wickedness of Babylon. Characterised by dread-locked hair and ganja smoking, its members reject private property.
Port of Spain:	capital of Trinidad
Fidel Castro:	leader of the Marxist-Leninist government in Cuba
pitch-oil:	kerosene
scrunter:	derogatory term for a person reduced to begging
bold as brass:	defiantly
blight:	cause harm
Phoenician:	inhabitant of Syria
Corbeaux:	carrion crows
cardinals:	leading dignitaries of the Roman Catholic church
ecumenical:	representing the whole of the Christian world
mangrove:	tropical tree or shrub
ibises:	stork-like birds with long, curved bills, found in lakes and swamps
flags:	yellow fibrous shaft
bleached:	whitened by exposure to sunlight
arse:	damned, accursed, a term expressing frustration
bagasse:	dry pith of sugarcane, also indicating the dregs of society
emerald grass:	bright green grass
cadaverous:	corpse-like
Dante:	Dante Alligheri (1265-1321), Italian poet and author of *Divinia Commedia* comprising the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso*.
Rabelais:	Francois Rabelais (1495-1553), French physician, humanist and satirist whose great works are the satirical entertainments on popular giants titled *Gargantua* and *Pentagruel*.
Byron:	George Gordon Byron (1788-1824), English poet, dramatist and satirist, author of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, a satirical poem in which he attacks many of his contemporaries.

Quevedo: probably Raymond Quevedo who wrote a memoir titled *Attila's Kaiso* (1983), containing an anecdotal history of Trinidad calypso, written in the 1950s by this early practitioner who performed as 'Atilla the Hun' but most likely Francisco Gomez de Quevedo (1580-1645), Spanish poet and prose writer famous for his satires which show the commercialism, racialism, imperialism, slavery in his age.

Dryden: John Dryden (1631-1700), English poet, dramatist and satirist, wrote a biting satire on his contemporary poet Shadwell in *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) and on the state of the times in *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681).

Swift: Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), attacked contemporary politics, literature, religion, society in satires like *The Battle of Books* and *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

3.2.3 Analysis

Spoiler's return to Laventille and people's surprise at seeing him is the subject of the opening section of this poem. That this place was where Spoiler was famous as a calypsonian is obvious by his own statement that he had left his "conscience" and "rum-eaten wit" here. Indications of the poverty and squalor he lived in are provided by this phrase, which indicates he was a hard drinking man, and the next line in which he is described as a bag of bones. People express their curiosity at his return but some are put off by his ghostly appearance. Spoiler talks about his sojourn in hell where Satan, called "Hot Boy" by him, is a fan of his and listens to his songs on his stereo. Satan's partiality towards Spoiler makes him send the latter back to earth, not as a "bedbug" or a "flea" but as man dressed in a suit and a hat. He hints at the social function performed by the calypsonians, that of singing the "truth." Playing on the word "compose," he sends out a message that even though his physical appearance is subject to decay ("I decompose") his artistic abilities are still intact ("I composing still"). To give evidence of the latter he sings a snatch from one of his compositions about the attractions of women.

Spoiler's meditations on the current political and social situation in the Caribbean bring out the predatory instincts of those in power, whom he calls "sharks." These sharks thrive by exploiting the "small-fry" or ordinary people. The line "crab climbing crab-back, in a crab-quarrel" is wonderfully evocative of people using other people to attain power at somebody else's expense. The marine imagery used in the passage to describe bureaucrats and politicians as sharks and crabs accentuates their influence. If the Caribbean is an area of pristine, Edenic beauty with "clear coral rocks," these people are like ominous dark shadows across it. Spoiler hints that commoners aren't any better off under their chosen representatives than they were under a colonial government. The "colour and attire" of those in power may have changed but the exploitative mentality is still the same. The change in attire is indicated by the word "shirt-jacs," a name for a shirt-like garment which originated in Guyana in 1969 and which is worn for official occasions. For Spoiler the most effective weapon against the current scenario is satire and he invokes satirists like Martial, Juvenal and Pope to aid him in his endeavour. He laments the contemporary situation in the Caribbean and through Rochester's words expresses a pessimistic outlook towards it in his desire to be born as an insect or an animal. This is connected to his previous mention of Satan's kindness in allowing him to be reborn as a man rather than as a lower form of life. It seems as if taking into consideration the present circumstances Spoiler is regretting having come back to earth in human form. Spoiler is aware that his despondency is shared by other artists of the region

particularly the East Indian Caribbean author V.S. Naipaul who has analysed aspects of Caribbean culture and society in his novels and essays. Naipaul's critics have often accused him of presenting too gloomy a picture of the Caribbean in general and of Trinidad in particular. This explains Spoiler's play on Naipaul's name, "V.S. Nightfall" and the evocation of his most pessimistic work to date, *An Area of Darkness*. These two lines serve as a refrain underscoring the bleakness and despondency of Spoiler's vision of the Caribbean and of Trinidad. His realization that his grief is misspent is expressed as self-rebuke. He realizes that his "pearls of grief" are like water off a duck's back. This popular English idiom is made Caribbean by affixing another comparison with it. Spoiler's tears are also like water slipping off the smooth surface of a dasheen leaf. The majority of the populace remains unaffected by what is happening around them, turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to it, insulating themself against the "truth" which upsets Spoiler. Bewailing the lack of intelligence which makes people of colour objects of aesthetic appreciation without in any way alleviating their material conditions he says, "black still poor, though black is beautiful."

Continuing the insect imagery which had been introduced in the opening section of the poem, Spoiler compares the effect of his mockery to that of an insect bite. The point of comparison is the nuisance value of vermins like bedbugs, fleas and lice. The hypocrisy of those who make pretensions to liberal thoughts and action, and yet persecute others who are willing to effect change root and branch, is a prelude to their violent actions. These are effected to curb the fundamental democratic principle of freedom of expression and justified in the name of "human nature." Extenuation for these actions is provided by contrasting them with heinous historical crimes like genocide. Walcott puts a typical Trinidadian word "bohbohl" in Spoiler's vocabulary to ensure readers' understanding of corruption in Trinidad's economy.

One instance of public apathy to social concerns is the acceptance of restrictions on their freedom. The attitude is one which did not object to slavery in the past and didn't have an understanding of radical ideology like that propagated by Walter Rodney. Spoiler is himself accustomed to censorship but this does not stop him from giving voice to the misfortunes afflicting the country like the well known calypsonians who performed under the names Atilla and Commander. The technique of the calypso is that of "picong," a verbal war which according to Spoiler might soon be outlawed by the authorities. The various ideological state apparatuses like the television and press become vehicles for government propaganda. Complete control over natural resources and even nature itself is expressed in scatological terms. Even language has been corrupted by being used for nefarious means at the hands of unscrupulous journalists. Language is also wielded by the calypsonian but for ends quite different from that of the "local journalist" with his pretensions to a thorough understanding of the artistic and political scenario. The degeneration of the artistic impulse to a market oriented commodity, the hawking of a false idea of the "folk" has become a characteristic of all forms of art including the carnival. The commercialisation of this public celebration has made it another means to hoodwink the locals as well as the tourists. Music and melody are no longer what they previously were. The carnival masquerade consists of people dressed up in various costumes. In these days of role-playing some of the most popular figures people dress up as are Fidel Castro and Rastafarians who embody political justice. But since this ideal is far removed from Trinidadian society Spoiler comments that this is just "playing" or imitation.

Starting from a description of the squalor of Port of Spain, Spoiler extends the scope of this critical gaze to include Trinidad and the Caribbean. The stinking streets of the city make Spoiler call it hellish. The "oil-bloated economy" of the country suffered a serious blow in the eighties when the government found itself unable to call in the loans it had made to other Caribbean territories. Spoiler personifies the small nations of this part of the world as beggars with tins in their hands lining up to receive gratefully whatever meagre aid is doled out to them. The richer nations of the region, like oil-rich Trinidad, congratulate themselves on the charity they bestow to other

smaller regions in the name of black solidarity which couches their materialistic intent. Spoiler says he preferred the unity which resulted out of all the countries being under colonial servitude, "the Commonwealth of caiso," rather than this pseudo alliance of provider and dependents. Such a system has been responsible for the wide gap between the rich and the poor, it has led to the typical feature of a capitalist, consumerist society in which "who have, good for them, and who blight, blight." Bitterness and gall feed the calypsonian's anger, fortified with such nourishment it is no wonder that he expresses a death wish by uttering the words "I want to fall."

The multiracial identity of the Caribbean comprising Creoles and other ethnicities like Syrian and Indian, each community playing an important role in the economy, is evoked by Spoiler. He mentions the different occupations they are engaged in: the Syrian is called a "Phoenician trader" and the Indian is described as an agriculturalist. Both are shown as eager for profit whether monetary or political, it is the Creole who remains illiterate and unambitious. Lest this seem too harsh a depiction Spoiler hastens to add that every community is exploited by corrupt officers of the law. The pastoral scenario of ibises standing in the swamps, flags of corn waving in the fields and the drumming of a tabla across the plain is undercut by the use of phrases like "flags of distress." The Indians are called "children of Tagore" but this ancestery in which they are identified with this nationalist social reformer and man of letters is ironical especially in a scenario where such ideals and accomplishments have ceased to be virtues. Here poor farmers and fishermen work desperately to eke out a meagre living, existence is worse than hell where at least punishment is meted out to sinners according to the severity of the sins committed. The idea of hell as a graduated conical funnel, to the circles of which various categories of sinners are assigned, is from Dante's *Inferno*. Spoiler mentions Jesus, Dante and Rabelais as being in this hellish city for some time and acknowledging his presence by waving to him. I think this probably refers to the carnival masqueraders being influenced by mythology and literature and dressing up or "playing" these parts. The next few lines confirm this interpretation because all those playacting as satirists say they can be seen in "Satan tent" at the next carnival. During carnival the calypsonians contended for the title of calypso king by engaging in verbal wars, sometimes two of them combined forces to sing duets. One of the first duets was sung by Atilla the Hun and Roaring Lion. These contests for supremacy or "monarchy" not only served the purpose of entertainment but also of social criticism. In the last few lines of the poem Spoiler speaks of the calypsonian as the keeper of social conscience and acknowledges the influence of the famous verbal and literary satirists he has just named. The insignificance of this art in the present times is evident in the way Spoiler's return fails to evoke any excitement in the town. It is this which makes him go back "down" to hell. That satire has lost its cutting edge and has become ineffective as a weapon of social criticism is evident from the despondent choral refrain repeated at regular intervals in the poem and the pessimistic ending.

3.2.4 Carnival

The form and function of calypso can be interpreted within Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque outlined in *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Bakhtin read the carnival as part of a thousand year tradition of folk humour. The calypso, an inextricable part of carnival celebrations in Trinidad, has preserved the major types of traditional songs functionally associated with the lives of folk at work, at play, at worship and even in revolt (the insurrectionary songs of slaves). Carnival in Bakhtinian terms "belongs to the borderline sphere between art and life." Comic verbal compositions in it used a variety of genres and styles, both the official and the vernacular. If the calypso is taken as such a composition it can be seen to exhibit these features of mixing high and low vocabulary. Walcott's poem about a calypsonian is itself structured like a calypso, a dramatic monologue in rhymed couplets. Before Walcott, Errol Hill had used this form in his play *Man Better Man* in which the dialogue is entirely in calypso couplets. "The Spoiler's Return" in its intermingling of standard English and localisms in words, phrases and syntax subverts the hierarchy which

undervalues creole. Folk laughter and the ribaldry intrinsic to carnival traditions are present in the few lines of a calypso sung by Spoiler in the opening section of the poem. Grotesque realism associted with bodily functions is also effectively used in phrases like "What sweet in goat-mouth sour in his behind." Both Rabelaisian and Trinidad carnival ambience involves a participation of all sections of society, here the calypsonian is a spokesman for these oppressed masses. The established order is temporarily suspended during carnival celebrations when the utopian ideal and the realistic merge as servants don the garb of their masters who dress in rags. Spoiler's composition and the Trinidad calypso, though part of the temporary suspension of reality, express a wish for an inversion in which freedom of speech, social justice and solidarity becomes the order of the day. Reality, pointed out through satirical means, is never lost sight of, but the possibility of change is an unexpressed hope which is never really abandoned in the calypso.

3.3 FROM *MIDSUMMER*

3.3.1 Poetry as Autobiography

Like *Another Life* (1973), a sequence of lyrics from Walcott's middle period of poetry, *Misdummer* is an exploration of aspects of the poet's intensely personal moments of life. In both collections the influence of the American poet Robert Lowell's much acclaimed *Life Studies* (1959) can be traced. Lowell's work contains poetic and prose recollections of his family, his childhood and his mature experiences of marriage, imprisonment and hospitalization for mental problems. This started the trend for what came to be called "Confessional" poetry in which the revelation of the private universe with all its attendant irrationality became acceptable. Madness, for instance, was a hitherto taboo aspect of private life but in the poetry of Lowell and Sylvia Plath it became a theme for the enunciation of one's identity. Walcott's poetry has its moments of tortured anguish which indicates its links with confessional verse. However since these moments are only one aspect of these two collections I prefer to use the term 'autobiographical poetry' for them. Let me point out some similarities between them. Immediate family members are made the subjects of poetry. Some poems in the early collection are addressed specifically to Walcott's mother while in the later work his first wife and his daughters figure prominently. The memory of his father Warwick Walcott and the paintings he left behind is reworked into poems in both *Another Life* and *Midsummer*. The visual arts, especially in comparison to the verbal art of poetry, is a much discussed theme. To this end *Another Life* alludes principally to Italian Renaissance painters while *Midsummer* refers to Northern painters like Breughel, Durer, Vermeer and in the French tradition to Chardin and Gauguin. The poet's painter friends Harry Simmons and Dunstan St. Omer (called Gregorias) are mentioned as playing a significant role in his artistic development. The future trends this development might take are prefigured in *Midsummer*. In the two untitled sections of this collection chosen for discussion I shall be pointing out these trends.

3.3.2 The Text

FROM ***MIDSUMMER***

XXV

The sun has fired my face to terra-cotta.
It carries the heat from his kiln all through the house.
But I cherish its wrinkles as much as those on blue water.
Gnats drill little holes around a saw-toothed cactus,
a furnace has curled the knives of the oleander,
and a branch of the logwood blurs with wild characters.
A stone house waits on the steps. Its white porch blazes.

I tell you a promise brought to me by the surf:
You shall see transparent Helen pass like a candle
flame in sunlight, weightless as woodsmoke that hazes
the sand with no shadow. My palms have been sliced by the twine
of the craft I have pulled at for more than forty years.
My Ionia is the smell of burnt grass, the scorched handle
of a cistern in August squeaking to rusty islands;
the lines I love have all their knots left in.
Through the stunned afternoon, when it's too hot to think
and the muse of this inland ocean still waits for a name,
and from the salt, dark room, the tight horizon line
catches nothing, I wait. Chairs sweat. Paper crumples the floor.
A lizard gasps on the wall. The sea glares like zinc.
Then, in the door light: not Nike loosening her sandal
but a girl slapping sand from her foot, one hand on the frame.

XXVI

Before that thundercloud breaks from its hawsers,
those ropes of rain, a wind makes the sea grapes wince,
and the reef signals its last flash of lime.
Feeling her skin cool, the housemaid August
runs into the yard to pull down clouds, like a laundress,
from the year's meridian, her mouth stuffed with wooden pins.
She's seen these flashes of quartz, she knows it's time
for the guests on the beach to come up to the house,
and, hosing sand from scorched feet, let the hinges rust
in holes for another year. But an iron band
still binds their foreheads: the bathers stand
begging the dark clouds, whose spinnakers race over the dunes,
for one more day. Here, the salt vine dries
as fast as it grows, and before you look, a year's gone
with your shadow. The temperate homilies can't
take root in sand; the cicada can fiddle his tunes
all year, if he likes, to the twig-brown ant.
The cloud passes high like a god staying his powers-
the pocked sand dries, umbrellas reopen like flowers-
but those who measure midsummer by a year's trials
have felt a chill grip an ankle. They put down their books
to count the children crouched over pools, and the idolaters
angling themselves to the god's face, like sundials.

XXVI

Certain things here are quietly American-
that chain-link fence dividing the absent roars
of the beach from the empty ball park, its holes
muttering the word umpire instead of empire;
the grey, metal light where an early pelican
coasts, with its engine off, over the pink fire
of a sea whose surface is as cold as Maine's.
The light warms up the sides of white, eager Cessnas
parked at the airstrip under the freckling hills
of St. Thomas. The sheds, the brown, functional hanger,
are like those of the Occupation in the last war.
The night left a rank smell under the casuarinas,
the villas have fenced-off beaches where the natives walk,
illegal immigrants from unlucky islands
who envy the smallest polyp its right to work.

Here the wetback crab and the mollusc are citizens,
and the leaves have green cards. Bulldozers jerk
and gouge out a hill, but we all know that the dust
is industrial and must be suffered. Soon-
the sea's corrugations are sheets of zinc
soldered by the sun's steady acetylene. This
drizzle that falls now is American rain,
stitching stars in the sand. My own corpuscles
are changing as fast. I fear what the migrant envies:
the starry pattern they make-the flag on the post office-
the quality of the dirt, the fealty changing under my foot.

Glossary

Midsummer XXV

terra-cotta: unglazed, brownish-red pottery

kiln: furnace of oven for firing pottery

gnats: small, winged insects

oleander: evergreen shrub

logwood: a tree found in the Caribbean whose wood is used for dyeing and blossoms for honey

Helen: in Homer's *Iliad* the wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta whose free or forced elopement with Paris causes the war between the Greeks and Trojans.

twine: rope

Ionia: a region away from mainland Greece where early Greek literature and philosophy were principally developed

cistern: tank for storing water

line: piece of cord or rope e.g. fishing line

knots: intertwining of ropes

Nike: in Greek religion the female personification of victory, statues depict her with wings

Midsummer XXVII

pelican: large water bird with pouch in its bill for storing fish

Maine: a region in New England, U.S.A.

freckling: light brown coloured

St. Thomas: small U.S. island in the Caribbean

Occupation: occupation of France by German forces during the Second World War

Casuarinas:	tree with needle-like, leafless branches
polyp:	simple organism with tube shaped body
molluse:	soft bodied, hard shelled animals like snails and oysters
green card:	prerequisite for citizenship in the U.S.A.
corrugation:	contract into wrinkles or folds
acetylene:	flame used for soldering
fealty:	a feudal tenant's loyalty to the lord

3.3.3 Analysis

These two numbered sections from *Midsummer* contain detailed descriptions of the landscape and illustrate Walcott's "contribution to the resurrection of 'landscape poetry'" (Jone 37). In an early poem addressed to Edward Thomas (1878-1917), whose work shows a keen observation of English pastoral scenes, Walcott had said "topography delineates its verse." This can just as easily be applied as a general characteristic of Walcott's oeuvre. Dr Johnson has described topographical poetry as "local poetry, of which the fundamental object is some particular landscape . . . with the addition of . . . historical retrospection or incidental meditation." Here topography becomes the point of entry for meditations on the poet's sources of creativity. "XIV" begins by describing the poet's acute consciousness of the process of ageing. The brownish red hue of terra-cotta acquired by firing it in a kiln becomes an image for the poet's aged and weather-beaten appearance. But this is not a source of grief since co-relates for this process can be found in nature: the ripples on the water are like "wrinkles," the pointed leaves of the oleander droop in the sun as sapped of energy as people and a branch of a tree shows signs of decay ("blurs with wild characters").

It appears as if the direction the poet's creativity will take in the future is also delineated by the topography, the waves make a "promise" to him. The mythological figure of Helen is described as the dominant icon of this creativity whose moment of inspiration is fleeting. The evanescence is accentuated by the words "transparent" and "weightless" used for this momentary vision of Helen vouchsafed to the artist. The apprenticeship for this moment has been long and hard, "forty years," for this is the midsummer of the poet's life. Playing on the dual meanings of the word "craft," as an acquired skill and a small boat, Walcott says he has "pulled" or laboured at it. The mention of Ionia, away from mainland Greece, indicates the awareness of the marginality of poetry from this region. Both landscape and seascape are evoked through the words "scorched grass" and "cistern," the unpolished rough hewn quality of the poet's work being a reflection of the "rusty islands" themselves. The pun on the word "lines" which have "knots" in them becomes ironical in the context of critics' valuation of Walcott's poetry as exhibiting a too-finished quality in its form and content. Besides meaning a rope or a cord and a line of poetry, "line" is also used in another sense of a fishing rod which "catches" nothing. The second time it is mentioned it is made into a compound word "horizon line," the horizon catches fire with the blaze of the setting sun, the glow symbolising poetic inspiration which is denied to him in the darkness of his room. The crumpled papers are evidence of the poet's labour at his craft which at certain times, like the moment described here, is uninspired by the muse. The gasp of the lizard and the metallic glare of the sea seen to blame the poet's seemingly futile efforts. Even when the door opens to let in the light it is not the brightness of victory over lack of poetic inspiration, "not Nike loosening her sandal," but a local girl entering the room.

This girl is personified as "the housemaid August" in section XXVI of *Midsummer* which is not discussed in this unit. In the next section XXVII the poet describes in detail the "quietly American" landscape of the island of St. Thomas. The "chain-link fence" which divides the sea from the ball park or the elemental from the civilizational is like the hedge rows dividing the "wild green landscape" from the "pastoral farms" in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." The sense of supervision and control implied by the word "empire" is both contained and extended by "umpire." Only the rules of the game have altered, since what was once a playground for the empire builders has now become a resort for rich tourists whose means of relaxation here are the sea and sports. The continuation of colonialism as neo-colonialism involves only a slight shift signified by the change effected in empire by replacing the letter e with u. The Americanised way of life is perceived as mechanical, the pelican's gliding over the sea is like an airplane's with its "engine off." In the last few lines the bright glare of sunlight is referred to as the acetylene flame which is soldering the zinc-like rippled surface of the sea. The Americanisation of the landscape is reinforced by comparisons with places like Maine in the New England region of America. Small air crafts used by the tourists for communting are linked to those used by the Germans for the "Occupation" of France in the Second World War. The imperialistic overtones are hard to miss specially in the lines where developmental work is seen as hazardous to the landscape from which hills are gouged out by bulldozers. The tourism industry and its detrimental impact on the Caribbean is a topic much discussed in literature. Trevor Rhone's play *Smile Orange* (1971) is a comic elaboration of this theme in contrast to Walcott's grim presentation of it in this poem.

The affluent class whose members pay for the rights and privileges of living or holidaying on St. Thomas jealously guard the natural surroundings from natives. There is a great disparity between the economies of the various Caribbean islands. Those who migrate from impoverished or "unlucky" islands seek employment in places like St. Thomas, lucky enough to be a part of America. A migrant's dream of citizenship to the U.S.A., fulfilled on acquiring a green card, is gently satirized by the poet when he says that the leaves on the island have green cards. The aggressiveness of the residents of this place in safeguarding their interests and their indifference to the social inequality is brought out in the poet's nomenclature of the citizens as "crabs," ever ready to attack and "molluscs," who retreat into their shells. The pattern of stars and stripes on the American flag is worked into the poem through the star-like indentation made on the earth when raindrops fall on it. The migrant's desire for belonging to a more affluent country is called "envy" and distanced from the poet's "fear" of it. When even the soil seems to lose its Caribbean identity in favour of an American one, the poet's anxiety, about the psychological changes effected due to the topographical changes involved in migration, becomes understandable.

3.3.4 Imagi/Nation

In making poetry out of his most private experiences, like the difficulties of creative output and his fears of migrancy, Walcott has used a long, expansive verse line. By his own admission it is "reflective, and contains a lot of indirection, and psychology, and self-analysis and connotation" (Walcott, "Thinking Poetry" 186). The free verse pattern with its irregular, unrhymed lines which has been followed in *Midsummer* seems best suited to express the autobiographical, introspective concerns. One facet of this introspection is themes for poetry to be written much later. In "XXVI" it appears to have been prophesied to the poet that he will write about Helen which in turn leads him to think of his Ionia. This prophecy is fulfilled, as it were, in the publication of *Omeros* in 1990 in which Helen is both a stunning negro woman as well as the poet's island St. Lucia. The creative imagination elucidates a Greek epic with St. Lucia, the nation, as its epistemological context.

This closely approximates to the migrants' fear of losing touch with the nation as a source of creativity expressed poignanty in "XXVII" as "the fealty changing." In

"*Midsummer* LIV" there is an attempt to imprint the landscape that "made" the poet. The guilt as well as the necessity of movement to another land is conveyed in the line "the faith that I betrayed, or the faith that betrayed me." I pointed out at the beginning of this unit that from the 1970s Walcott began spending part of every year in America and the other part in the Caribbean. The idea of straddling two cultures and the danger of prioritising the adopted over the native is an anxiety which besets the poet. The concluding lines of "LIV" express this by mentioning Joseph, Jacob's son, who was forced to stay away from his homeland: "Ah Joseph, though no man ever dies in his own country,/ the grateful grass will grow thick from his heart" (*CP* 510). Nation thus emerges as the basis of identity in Walcott's poetry and imagination as the migrant's only means of reclaiming it.

3.4 FROM *OMEROS*

3.4.1 Cultural Translation

In relocating characters from Homer's epic into a Caribbean setting Walcott effects a cultural translation which can be compared to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In his seminal essay on this topic Homi Bhabha uses translation as a metaphor, a rhetorical figure describing the " increasing internationalisation of cultural production." The performative terms of cultural engagement, the introduction of other incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition is seen by Bhabha as an act of cultural translation. He insists on the cannonising and sacralizing of the "transparent assumptions of this translation attempted from a migrant, hybrid perspective. I have shown how this is true of re-versions of canonical texts like *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*. Based on Walcott's statements I think this can partially explain the author's agenda in re-writing the Homeric epic in *Omeros*. The author's views on literature, like his pronouncements on history, have come under attack in recent times when post-colonial writers are expected to "write back" with a vengeance. He has often commented on the similarities between Mediterranean and Caribbean cultures, the most obvious reason for this being that both regions are characterised by their proximity to the sea. He does, however, take issue with those who question his claim to the idea of Greece but accept unquestioningly Joyce's right to it because of a shared European-ness:

> As West Indians, we are closer in temperament to the Greeks than they are. . . . If I think of the classic in the Caribbean, I think of modern. I think of the freshness of Homer. I don't think of the antiquity of Homer. I think of the immediacy of Homer. So if I feel this, yes: I understand islands, I understand sails, I understand wind, and I understand the weather. I understand that. I understand what he felt. It's not that I'm trying to be Homeric. I am on an island in an inland ocean, so the correspondence leaps centuries . . . (Walcott, "Interview" 291).

Look closely at the above quotation, the word "understand" is reiterated no less than five times. So it would not be accurate to say that Walcott's cultural translation of the Homeric epic is merely an attempt to appropriate and subvert the dominant literary tropes of a canonical Western work. Rather it can be seen as setting up "correspondences" between two cultures and their literatures. Walcott has often expressed his view about the cultural peripherality of the Greeks: "the Greeks were the niggers of the Mediterranean" (Walcott, "Thinking Poetry" 183). In the context of this it becomes important to see the relations and affiliations between the works and only then turn to the appropriations and subversions. In an essay on the wound trope in *Omeros* John Ramazani has stressed these very "interethnic connection[s]. The conclusion of this essay provides a qualification to postcolonial theory which

victim and the victimiser, "Appropriating a Western icon of suffering and refashioning a polysemous and multiparented trope, Walcott's *Omeros*, together with the poetry of Goodison, Brathwaite, p'Bitek, and Ramanujan, champions a post colonial poetics of affliction that obliterates the distinction between "victim's literature" and its supposed opposite" (Ramazani 415).

3.4.2 The Text

From *Omeros*

III

"O-meros," she laughed, "That's what we call him in Greek,"
stroking the small bust with its boxer's broken nose,
and I thought of Seven Seas sitting near the reek

of drying fishnets, listening to the shallows' noise.
I said: "Homer and Virg are New England farmers,
and the winged horse guards their gas-station, you're right."

I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as
cold as its marble, then the shoulders in winter light
in the studio attic. I said, "Omeros."

And *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, mer was
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
os, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.
Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes
that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed.

The name stayed in my mouth. I saw how light was webbed
on her Asian cheeks, defined her eyes with a black
almond's outline, as Antigone turned and said:

"I'm tired of America, its's time for me to go back
to Greece. I miss my islands." I write, it returns-
the way she turned and shook out the black gust of hair.

I saw how the surf printed its lace in patterns
on the shore of her neck, then the lowering shallows
of silk swirled at her ankles, like surf without noise,
and felt that another cold bust, not hers, but yours
saw this with stone almonds for eyes, its broken nose
turning away, as the rustling silk agrees.

But if it could read between the lines of her floor
like a white-hot deck uncaulked by Antillean heat,
to the shadows in its hold, its nostrils might flare

at the stench from manacled ankles, the coffled feet
scraping like leaves, and perhaps the inculpable marble
would have turned its white seeds away, to widen

the bow of its mouth at the horror under her table,
from the lyre of her armchair draped with its white chiton,
to do what the past always does: suffer, and stare.

She lay calm as a port, and a cloud covered her
with my shadow; then a prow with painted eyes
slowly emerged from the fragrant rain of black hair.

And I heard a hollow moan exhaled from a vase,
not for kings floundering in lances of rain; the prose
of abrupt fishermen cursing over canoes.

Glossary

Omeros:	Greek name for Homer, author of the epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*
Seven Seas:	the blind seer in *Omeros*, intended as the St. Lucian analogue of Homer who was said to be blind
shallows:	submerged sandbank
winged horse:	in Greek mythology Pegasus is a winged horse
sibilant:	with a hissing sound
washes:	agitated motion of water as in waves
Antigone:	in Greek mythology one of the four children of Oedipus, the subject of a tragedy by Sophocles in which she disobeys her uncle Creon to bury the body of her brother Polyneices
caulk:	stop up the seams of a ship with oakum and melted pitch
hold:	a cavity in a ship below the deck where cargo is stored
coffled:	train of slaves fastened together
inculpable:	not worthy of blame
seeds:	generations
bow:	fore-end of a ship
lyre:	musical instrument
prow:	projecting front part of a ship
floundering:	move with great difficulty
lances:	long spear used by horsemen

3.4.3 Analysis

This extract from *Omeros* delineates one of those moments in which the author makes his presence felt in the narrative. The narrator's memory of a conversation about Homer, called Omeros in Greek, provides an entry point into the literary and social ancestry. A statue of Homer with a chipped nose reminds him of Seven Seas, the Homeric persona in this work. In a section preceding the one from which this extract has been taken Seven Seas' daily rituals involving homely details like preparation of breakfast, waiting for the sunrise had already been detailed. The conjunction between the marble statue of Homer and Seven Seas had already been made there:

Except for one hand he sat as still as marble with his
egg-white eyes, fingers recounting the past of
another sea, measured by the stroking oars.
(*Omeros* 14)

If Seven Seas is a localised Homer it is no wonder that New England farmers are called by the names of epic poets like Homer and Virgil or even that the winged horse becomes the sign for a local gas station or petrol pump. This is in keeping with the use of Homeric names for the St. Lucian villagers who are the "heroes" of this Caribbean epic. So Philoctetes becomes 'Philoctete," Achilles is named "Achille," and Hector and Achille complete for the attentions of Helen, a local girl who has worked as a housemaid and a waitress.

Homer's statue kept in the "studio attic" of the artist-narrator is invested with a life-like presence. The narrator feels it is "watching," and later senses its "turning away." The utterance of its name "Omeros" is linked to the sounds of nature like the "crunch" of dry leaves and the water moving in and out of cavernous openings in rocks. This can be seen as an acknowledgement of the detailed descriptions of various aspects of nature which characterise the Homeric epics. The breaking of the word into its constituents to make it signify natural manifestations invests it with accretions of meaning, much like a neologism. Both the nurturing and the destructive potential of the sea is highlighted through the division of the word and the explanation of its parts. The invocation contained in the letter "O," a feature of epic poetry connoting high classicism, is counterpoised with "Antillean patois" in which "mer" means both mother and sea. French creole, used in interpreting "os" as the grey bone, is posited as having at least equal standing with the language of the classical epics. The crashing of the surf on the shore is onomatopoeically reproduced in the pronunciation of Omeros.

Significantly even the woman who uttered the word has a Greek name, Antigone. And yet her appearance is Asian with big almond shaped eyes accentuated by the light filtering through a window in the studio attic. Links between the American islands where the narrator and his work are located and the Greek islands to which both the poet's literary precursor Omeros and his muse Antigone belong are made when the latter expresses a wish to go back to her islands in Greece. That this is a memory of events long past is indicated by the phrase "I write, it returns." The image of the woman with black hair, a lacy collar and a swirling silk dress is curiously conjoined with that of a ship sailing upon the seas. The sea waves beating at the ship are like the silk swirling at the ankles forming a picture observed by the all-knowing eyes of Homer who, the narrator says, would be shocked if he could "read between the lines." The narrator taps ancestral memory to revive the horrors of the Middle Passage when slaves were bundled in the hold of the ship like cargo. The caulking of a ship's floor hides its seams, an "uncaulked" surface or unsmoothened reality would not be a very attractive sight. The "Antillean heat" which uncaulks the deck of the ship is the poet's own creativity laying bare the foundations of Caribbean society under the veneer of civilized sophistication symbolized by the "white chiton" covering the armchair. Omeros only observes this vision and turns away his head, it is up to the modern Omeros, the narrator himself, to interpret the past and put it to creative use in his "craft," the pun linking poetry and ship or by extension the muse of his poetic inspiration who is also the vessel carrying memories underlying his poetry.

The collation of the two is extended towards the end of the extract. The cloud covering the vessel is also the poet consummating his union with the muse (the Asian looking woman with the Greek names) attesting to the varied cultural sources the narrator taps on for the distinctly Caribean voice he achieves. The "hollow moan" he hears from the vase-like throat of his muse carries within it the suffering of the enslaved Africans as well as the frustration of their descendents, the fishermen,

epic situations described by Homer in which heroic kings like Odysseus are shown as being caught in tempests at sea, the narrator calls his medium of expression "simple prose" as opposed to the epic verse of Homer.

3.4.4 Epic Re-vers[e]ion

When asked about the metrical form of his epic, Walcott replied that it was "Roughly hexametrical with a terza rima form. It's like a combination of a Homeric line and a Dantesque design" ("An Interview" 174). The hexameter is the metre of epic and didactic poetry consisting of six metra (a short sequence of syllables). Every line has a caesura or 'cut' which means that a word-end occurs regularly within a particular metron. The *terza rima* form consists of a series of interlocking tercets in which the second line of each one rhymes with the first and third lines of the succeeding one. It is Italian in origin and was first successfully used by Dante in *Divinia Commedia.* Ramazani commenting on Walcott's versification says, "Perhaps the most ambitious English-language poem of the decolonized Third World, Walcott's *Omeros* fills hundreds of pages with rolling hexameters in terza rima . . ." (406). The word "rolling" in the above comment captures succinctly the sea-like rhythm of the tercets. You must also keep in mind that the author does not strictly adhre to these metrical regulations. Let me give you an example from the passage just analysed:

> I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as
> cold as marble, then the shoulders in winter light
> in the studio attic. I said, "Omeros,"
>
> and O was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was
> both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
> *os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

The rhyme scheme of the two tercets given above is not aba, bcb as demanded by the *terza rima*, it is rather aba, aca. Also the third line being shorter than the others is not hexametrical. Other innovations include ending many of the lines with words containing the "s" sound which reproduces the sound of the sea within the structure of the poem. Even the relatively conventional versification contains stratetgic re-versions which make them more reflective of the Caribbean ethos evoked in the work.

3.5. LET US SUM UP

By now you should be able to comprehend the differences between Walcott's work till the seventies and the poetry he wrote in the eighties and nineties. I have analysed three pieces from his later work which are varied in terms of their form and content. "The Spoiler's Return," a dramatic monologue, satirically comments on the socio-economic situation in Trinidad. The numbered passages from *Midsummer* are introspections in free verse capturing an exile's sensibility. The extract from *Omeros* in hexametrical *terza rima* stresses both the literary and social heritage of the narrator, or the poetic persona in the epic. Walcott's later poetry is characterised by woman as an image of poetic inspiration whether it is the maid in the *Midsummer* passages or Antigone in *Omeros*. In this Walcott adheres to stereotypes of archetypal male representations of women which can be effectively analysed from a feminist perspective.

3.6 QUESTIONS

Q.1 Examine the impact of popular cultural forms like the calypso on Walcott's poetry.

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

Walcott, Derek. *Omeros*. 1990. London: Faber and Faber, 1991.

Secondary Material

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UNIT 4 (EDWARD) KAMAU BRATHWAITE-I

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Barbados
4.2 Edward Kamau Brathwaite
  4.2.1 Poet
  4.2.2 Historian
  4.2.3 Cultural Commentator
4.3 Wings of A Dove
  4.3.1 Counterculture
  4.3.2 The Text
  4.3.3 Analysis
  4.3.4 Drum Poetry
4.4 Ananse
  4.4.1 Folk Imagination
  4.4.2 The Text
  4.4.3 Analysis
  4.4.4 Magical Realism
4.5 Let Us Sum Up
4.6 Questions
4.7 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are (a) to introduce Edward Kamau Brathwaite as a poet, historian and cultural commentator, (b) to look at his early poetry especially from the trilogy *The Arrivants*. The poems will be discussed in the context of Brathwaite's historical and cultural analysis included in *Roots*, a representative selection comprising essays from the 1950s to the 1980s. For understanding Brathwaite's poetry you must pay special attention to his use of culture-specific concepts from Africa and the Caribbean, his use of nation language and the oral narrative tradition he incorporates in it.

4.1 BARBADOS

Barbados, the island where Brathwaite was born in 1930, is the most easterly of the Caribbean island chain and is located some eighty miles out from that chain, alone in the Atlantic. It had been deserted by indigenous Carib Indians by the time the English arrived in 1625. The first African slaves were brought to it in 1627. Because the island is relatively small and its open terrain allows access to all parts of the country it had been assumed that the slaves were completely engulfed by the dominant European culture and lost all traces of their African past. Brathwaite comments on this assumption in the preface to *Mother Poem*. Barbados is the "most English of West Indian islands but at the same time nearest, as the slaves fly, to Africa. Hence the Protestant Pentecostalism of its language, interleaved with Catholic bells and kumina." Kumina is a ritual ceremony of singing, drumming, dancing and spirit-possession brought over from Africa to the New World by the slaves. Its prevalence attests to the continuance and resilience of African culture in Barbados. Racially the island is one of the most demographically homogeneous territories in the Caribbean, with more than ninety per cent people of African descent and the rest of European or non-African mixed ancestry.

The evolution of Brathwaite's poetic career has often been linked to that of his country. At the time when Brathwaite was growing up Barbados was still an English colony. Brathwaite left for England in the 1950s to study History at Pembroke

College, Cambridge University. He worked in Ghana for eight years and came back to join as Professor of History at the University of West Indies, Jamaica. Apart from his childhood and adolescent years he has never stayed at Barbados for an extended period of time and yet the sense of being a "Bajan," of belonging to Barbados, permeates his work. So it is only appropriate to view the appearance of his first major volume of poetry, *Rights of Passage* (1967), a year after the island's independence, as events reinforcing each other, the poetry marking an independence of language. The first volume of his second trilogy, *Mother Poem*, published in 1977 has been called by the poet as being all about "my mother, Barbados." The landscape of this region-Barbados is a coral island with an underground water supply, filtered through the porous limestone coral rock - is detailed in the opening poem of this collection:

> The ancient water sources of my island
> echo of river, trickle, worn stone,
> the sunken voice of glitter inching its pattern to the sea,
>
> memory of form, fossil, erased beaches high above the eaten
> boulders of St. phillip.
> my mother is a pool. (*Mother Poem*, hereafter *M*, 3)

A recent collection in which the sense of being a part of and yet apart from his native land is thematised is titled *Barabajan Poems (1492-1992)* (1994). Mixing genres the collection includes poetry, prose, proems (prose poems), the letter, the footnote, autobiography and bibliography. It includes selections of Bajan poetry and hence can also be called an anthology of sorts. But while it is a celebration of Bajan creativity it is also a severe indictment of the recent history of the island which has made it a tourist paradise at the expense of its inhabitants. One instance of this is the connection the poet makes between the building of golf courses, which he calls golf "curses," and the serious drought which has prevailed in Barbados over the past few years (Savory 756).

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

4.2 (EDWARD) KAMAU BRATHWAITE

The 1994 Neustadt Prize Ceremonies, 30 September 1994





WALTER NEUSTADT JR., AMBASSADOR RUDI WEBSTER, KAMAU BRATHWAITE, MARY BRATHWAITE MORGAN, *WLT* BOARD OF VISITORS MEMBER TANIA NORRIS

4.2.1 Poet

Brathwaite's poetic career parallels Walcott's in many respects. Not only are they poets of international repute, both are authors of works which have been called "epics" of Caribbean literature. Brathwaite's epic is titled *The Arrivants: A New Word Trilogy* (1973) and comprises his early collections of poetry interlinked by the trope of a journey which is also the governing idea of Walcott's *Omeros*. He has explained the trilogic form in the dialectical terms of raising an issue, replying to it and trying to create a synthesis:

> In other words, the first question, which is in *Rights of Passage*, is: How did we get into the Caribbean? Our people, the black people of the Caribbean - what was the origin of their presence in the Caribbean? And the antitheses to that was - well, the answer to that which emerged was that they came out of migration out of Africa, so that the second movement in the trilogy was the answer to that question. We came out of Africa. Hence, *Masks*. And then, we came out of Africa and went into the New World. Hence, *Islands*.
>
> (Brathwaite "An Interview," 13)

Like Achille in *Omeros*, the poetic persona journeys back to the land of his ancestors: "Exiles from here// to seas/ of bitter edges,// whips of white worlds,/ stains of new// rivers,/ I have returned" (*Arrivants* 153). The trilogy has been seen as providing an "etiology" of Afro-Caribbean experience through a narrative of an African experience originating on the mother continent and extending to the diaspora (Irele 721). Historical, autobiographical and poetic concerns are interwoven in the work. It presents simultaneously a historical account of the New World civilization and its roots in Africa. It is not a literature of despair or recrimination but about the foundation of Caribbean culture in its varied forms be it Rastafarianism, Jazz, Calypso or cult practices like Shango worship. The diasporic experience articulated is that of the author himself who has lived away from Barbados and whose stay in Kenya even resulted in his re-naming from Edward to Kamau.

Much has been written about American and Caribbean influences on Brathwaite's work. Attempts have been made to link his poetry to major American poets like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and Charles Olson. But apart from acknowledging his attraction

for Eliot's "speaking voice," Brathwaite has denied their work as having had an impact on his creativity, "I cannot say I've been influenced by them, I don't know them well enough." In contrast to this he has acknowledged a Caribbean tradition within which his poetry can be placed, "There - if people want to - yes, that's the lineage: Cesaire, Brathwaite, Guillen, Damas" (Brathwaite, "An Interview" 25). The most clear correspondences drawn are those between Cesaire's *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* and Brathwaite's *Arrivants*, both starting from local reality to etch the topographical, linguistic and sociological aspects of the Caribbean. Other Negritude poets like Senghor and Damas were available to Brathwaite through anthologies. Manifestations of orality and the importance of music in his work can be said to owe something to them. Brathwaite's efforts in founding and running the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), started by him in London in 1967 along with John La Rose and Andrew Salkey, brought him in touch with Caribbean poets based in Britain. He has read poetry with dub poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mutabaruka and Amiri Baraka. Performing his own poetry was in a way a natural corollary to the oral rhythms in Brathwaite's work. His reading of the *Arrivants* trilogy was issued as a five-disc set in the 1970s under the record label Argo.

4.2.2 Historian

Brathwaite trained as a historian first at Cambridge where he received his Bachelor's degree and then at Sussex where he submitted his Doctoral thesis entitled "The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820." This was published by the Oxford University Press in 1971. In this work he calls creolization a "cultural action" or a "social process" based upon the response of individuals within society to their environment and to each other. The process takes place in stages, starting with the "seasoning" of slaves when they were branded, given new names and put under apprenticeship to already creolized slaves. During this period they learnt the language and the work. This led to their "socialization" which, in cases where the slaves lived in close proximity with their masters, like the household slaves, resulted in imitation. Forms of imitation could be behavioural as well as linguistic in which case the typical West Indian imagination could be characterised by the phrase "The snow was falling in the canefields." Brathwaite criticizes the elite blacks for losing touch with their folk culture and hence losing their chance for independence. An extremely important section of this work is that in which he describes the African orientation of Jamaican folk culture and the continuances and subversive potential of the slaves' rituals and language. This was published separately as *The Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* by New Beacon Books in 1971. In his articles for *Timheri* Brathwaite extended the concept of creolization to a socio-cultural description of the four main culture carriers of the region - Amerindian, European, African and East Indian - and how they interacted with each other. However, even here he stresses the recognition of an ancestral relationship with the folk or aboriginal culture. I shall summarise Brathwaite's cultural commentaries in the next section.

4.2.3. Cultural Commentator

Brathwaite's single most important and most controversial work on Caribbean culture is *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (1974). It was originally presented as a paper at a conference at John Hopkins University. In the introduction he talks of the Caribbean environment needing its own aesthetic, and of being the only delegate to a conference "dripping with the tropical sun." The essay makes statements like Africa is the "submerged mother of the Creole system" which can be questioned on the basis of Brathwaite's own pronouncements about the four different ethnicities together contributing to the creolization of Caribbean culture. Similarly his famous comment on Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* that white Creoles had not suffered enough in the Caribbean to belong is debatable to say the least. However it is the last line of the essay which is often quoted in discussing the Caribbean ethos. "The unity is submarine" is both a poetic statement of the pan-Caribbeanness he advocates as well as a challenge to the

academic conventions of the essay form, the limits of which Brathwaite explores in *Contradictory Omens*.

Besides this full length study of Caribbean culture Brathwaite has discussed aspects of it in essays and articles over a span of more than forty years. According to him artists in the West Indies face a "fragmented culture" which has led to a dissociation of sensibility in the early post-colonial literature. As and when consciousness of "rootlessness" has emerged, it has been from an emigrant perspective. Walcott, according to Brathwaite, expresses the pressures and dilemmas of this plural society. One aspect of this pluralism is the existence of subcultures and their impact on other aspects of cultural production like literature. Rastafarianism and the Jazz aesthetic are two such subcultures he discusses with respect to literature especially the West Indian novel. One of Brathwaite's major essay of recent years is "Metaphors of Underdevelopment: A Proem for Hernan Cortez" in which he begins by speaking of "a Bajan labourer" who is caught in "a cultural catastrophe." He explains that by culture he means "the texture and life-style of peoples . . . culture seen as dialectic of motion." Towards the end of the essay he has moved to a position in which cultures are seen as icons of the missile and the target, "just as the symbol of the expansionist is the missile, so the symbol of the subsistence exploited cultures becomes the circle, hole or target" ("Metaphors" 250). Brathwaite's cultural commentaries have, over the past three decades, widened in their focus from a delineation of Jamaican folk customs to a discussion of Caribbean cultural forms and finally encompassing underdeveloped third world nations.

4.3 WINGS OF A DOVE

4.3.1 Counterculture

In the previous unit I briefly explained Rastfarian beliefs. Here I forward the idea of Rastfarianism as a counterculture to the prevailing cultural mores in the Caribbean and particularly Jamaican society, as revealed through the beliefs and the language used by members of this sect. The existence of Rastas on the **margins** of society has been the subject of Caribbean fiction and poetry. Roger Mais's **novel** *Brother Man* (1954) depicting a Christ like Rastafarian has been analysed **by** Brathwaite in detail as an epitome of Jazz aesthetic. In the 1970s Orlando **Patterson** wrote a novel on the same theme titled *Children of Sisyphus* which shows the influence of Mais's work. In poetry the work of Dennis Scott and James Berry has dealt with this figure.

Rastafarianism developed in Jamaica, believed Ethiopia to be the ultimate home of all black people and its emperor, Haile Selassi, to be divine. The word originated from 'ras', 'chief', the title of an Ethiopian lord or prince and 'tafari,' family name of the emperor. The appearance and practices of members of this cult are a marker of their peripheral position. They follow certain Old Testament tenets including refusal to cut the hair and beliefs which include vegetarianism, ganja (opium) smoking and rejection of private property. In keeping with this last tenet they use the word Babylon in its Biblical sense to denote any society characterised by sinful pursuits. Such is the Westernized Jamaican society where people are engaged in dishonest commercial and political dealings. From its beginnings in the nineteen thirties the Rastafarian movement has had a great impact on the people of Jamaica and the Caribbean. Many of its ideas, considered marginal at its inception, have passed into the mainstream and become commonplaces of thought on black power and majority control. This appropriation has been oriented towards a demand for social justice in opposition to hegemonic practices exerted by the state and its apparatuses like the police and the judiciary. The impact of these ideas has been documented by historians like Walter Rodney and cultural critics like Rex Nettleford who see it as an expression of "black consciousness" in the face of a "continuing colonial society" based on suppression and oppression.

The Rastafarian efforts to counter power structures in society include a dismantling of hegemony imposed by structures of language. This is particularly evident in modes of address used for asserting identity. They consciously refer to themselves as "black men" rather than "Negroes," as a reaction to the derogatory use of the latter word since colonial times. In Jamaican creole the first person singular is usually expressed by the pronoun "me", and the plural by "we." To the Rastafarians, however, both "me" and "we" as objects of the sentence are always governed by the subject much like the way in which Europeans governed the slaves. Because the Rastas think the use of "me" points to a subservient attitude on the part of the blacks they insist on the use of "I" for the personal pronoun (Ashcroft 48-49). The letter can also be a homonym with "high" and indicates the spiritually bound human self shared by all believers probably because it is also the last syllable of Ras Tafari. While reading the poem you will notice that Brathwaite has used the counter-language of the Rastas as an inextricable element of his poetic idiom.

4.3.2 The Text

Wings of a Dove

1

Brother Man the Rasta
man, beard full of lichens
brain full of lice
watched the mice
come up through the floor-
boards of his down-
town, shanty-town kitchen,
and smiled. Blessed are the poor
in health, he mumbled,
that they should inherit this
wealth. Blessed are the meek
hearted, he grumbled,
for theirs is this stealth.

Brother Man the Rasta
man, hair full of lichens
head hot as ice
watched the mice
walk into his poor
hole, reached for his peace
and the pipe of his ganja
and smiled how the mice
eyes, hot pumice
pieces, glowed into his room
like ruby, like rhinestone
and suddenly startled like
diamond.

And I
Rastafar-I
in Babylon's boom
town. crazed by the moon
and the peace of this chalice, I
prophet and singer, scourge
of the gutter, guardian
Trench Town, the Dungle and Young's
Town, rise and walk through the now silent
streets of affliction, hawk's eyes
hard with fear, with

affection, and hear my people
cry, my people
shout:

Down down
white
man, con
man, brown
man, down
down full
man, frown-
ing fat
man, that
white black
man that
lives in
the town.

Rise rise
locks-
man, Solo-
man wise
man, rise
rise rise
leh we
laugh
dem, mock
dem, stop
dem, kill
dem an' go
back back
to the black
man lan'
back back
to Af-
rica.

2

Them doan mean it, yuh know,
Them cahn help it
But them clean-face browns in
Babylon town is who I most fear

an'who fears most I.
Watch de vulture dem a-fly-
in', hear de crow a-dem crow
see what them money a-by?

Caw caw caw caw.
Ol' crow, of crow, cruel of
ol' crow, that's all them got
To show.

Crow fly flip flop
hip hop
pun de ground; na
feet feel firm

pun de firm stones; na
good pickney born
from de flesh
o' dem bones;

naw naw naw naw.

3

So beat dem drums
dem, spread

dem wings dem,
watch dem fly

dem, soar dem
high dem,
clear in the glory of the Lord.

Watch dem ship dem
come to town dem

full o' silk dem
full o' food dem

an' dem 'plane', dem
come to groun' dem

full o' flash dem
full o' cash dem

silk dem food dem
shoe dem wine dem

that dem drink dem
an' consume dem

praisin' the glory of the Lord.

So beat dem burn
dem, learn

dem that dem
got dem nothin'

but dem
bright bright baubles

that will burst dem
when the flame dem

from on high dem
raze an' roar dem

an' de poor dem
rise an' rage dem

in de glory of the Lord.

Glossary

Dove:	a bird symbolising peace, particularly appropriate here since the Rastafarian motto is "peace and love."
Brother Man:	a familiar form of address for male members of the Rastafarian cult, also the title of a novel by the Jamaican novelist Roger Mais (1905-1955).
lichens:	a skin disease with reddish eruptions
downtown:	away from the centre of the town
shanty-town:	town consisting of huts, cabins and shacks
pumice:	light porous lava sometimes used as powder for polishing
ganja:	opium
ruby, rhinestone:	precious and semi-precious stones
Babylon:	in the Bible references to Babylon are disguised attacks on Rome seen as the ancient capital of persecution and paganism. The Rastas use the word to refer to any wicked Westernised society.
boomtown:	town flourishing from a period of prosperity or sudden activity in commerce
chalice:	literally goblet or Eucharist cup, here refers to the ganja pipe
scourge:	person regarded as bringer of punishment
Dungle and Young's Town:	Kingston's Dungle in Orlando Patterson's Rastafarian novel *Children of Sisyphus* (1965), elsewhere described by Brathwaite as a "city smouldering in garbage."
Soloman:	Brathwaite's neologism for the Biblical Solomon, a king famous for his wisdom, combining the senses of the only (solo) wise man and a lonely (solo) man
leh:	to permit, also used in the imperative to imply persuasion or threat
na:	no, especially at the folk level in answering a question
pickney:	young child of Black or East Asian parentage
dem:	used with a noun to indicate a group or a set
Crow:	different from an ordinary crow, used in the sense of a carrion crow who is almost as big as a vulture and feeds on carcasses.
baubles:	showy trinkets

4.3.3 Analysis

The characteristic Rastafarian term of address with which the poem begins sets the tone for other such conventions used in it. The shabby, unkempt appearance of the Rasta in this poem is not cultivated but all too real. His dilapidated lodgings in a "shanty-town" arise out of his poverty. It is true the members of this sect believe in a rejection of private property but the picture of squalor presented here goes far beyond idealistic beliefs. The mice coming up through his floorboards seem to the Rasta to embody his own situation of weakness of body and spirit. Like them he is tucked away in one corner of the house, stealthily passing his days, enveloped in beliefs born out of convictions or necessity. The only escape possible is derived from smoking ganja. The effect of the drug on him is almost instantaneous, suddenly it seems as if the eyes of the mice shine like diamonds. An ironic juxtaposition of imagined riches and the "poor hole" in which they suddenly appear is made in the second stanza. Here the drug induced hallucination makes the Rasta's "head as hot as ice," the phrase pointing to the illogical and extraordinary sense perceptions experienced in a drugged state. This state provides him with a respite from his poverty and social alienation, albeit a temporary one.

The return to reality is marked by an assertion of selfhood as the reiterated "I" testifies. Amidst the economic prosperity of modern day Jamaica the Rasta feels "crazed" and acknowledges that the drug is what offers him "peace." Smoking of ganja is prohibited by the rules of the wider society but for the Rastas it is a holy and wisdom-giving weed. It endows "Brother Man" with vision, imagination and the courage to step out of his hiding hole into the world outside. Here he notices that if suffering is a fact of existence for people, revolution is not far behind. His piercing hawk-like gaze takes in the toiling masses' cries for social justice which are transcribed in the poem. The socially privileged classes are the whites, the browns who are of mixed Afro-Caribbean and European ancestry and those among the blacks who ape them ("white black man"). Rastas are seen as agents of social amelioration, there is a call for the rise of men with "locks," matted or plaited hair of members of this sect. Not only is the Rasta wise like Solomon in his vision of equality and justice for all, he (Brathwaite insists on "man") is probably the only person who can translate this vision into reality. In "Solo-man," one of his more successful neologisms, Brathwaite has captured at once the wisdom and alienation of this "man." He realizes that satire as a weapon is useless against those who exploit others in "Babylon" hence violence remains the only effective means of counter-attack. Once these people are exterminated a true return to African values becomes possible. The phrase "back to Africa" is significant here because Rastafarianism is sometimes seen as having evolved out of Marcus Garvey's movement which used the same phrase. In it the raising of black consciousness was a prelude to an actual return to Africa.

In the second section of the poem the Rasta expresses the mutual distrust and fear characterising relations between his community and the "cleanfaced browns" who control society at large. Calling them predators by speaking of their meteoric rise as the flight of crows and vultures, he emphasizes the vice like grip ensured by the power of money. You will remember that in Walcott's poem "The Spoiler's Return," Spoiler had spoken of Trinidadian society in almost the same terms. Here Brathwaite reproduces sound effects by incorporating a rendition of the crow's cawing, flying and skipping on the ground: "caw, caw," "flip flop" and "hip hop." These phrases are used to indicate the relentless speechfying and the ubiquitousness of the people who actually control the country's resources. But that they are out of touch with the ground realities and that they pass on their attitudes and prejudices to the next generation constitutes another aspect of the Rasta's indictment. His protest is voiced in the reiteration of the word "naw" which in its strategic alteration of "caw" signifies a countering of the predatory order of things. An aspect of this order is the conspicuous consumption of articles of luxury like silk, shoes and wine listed in the third section of the poem. The tourist culture has contributed to the already sorry

state of affairs. The lure of the tourists' cash proves irresistible for some who use it to fulfil their desire for "bright bright baubles." These people, according to the Rasta, must be taught by violence or by education the insignificance of the things they crave for, suggesting that any affirmative action must be potentially revolutionary to be even remotely effective.

Biblical references and motifs present in the poem as in the phraseology "Blessed are the poor" and in words like "Babylon," "Solomon" and "chalice" gather momentum in the last section where the phrase "the glory of the Lord" is used like a refrain. Even the idea of the "boom-town" being overrun by birds of prey is derived from the book of *Revelation* in the Bible where Babylon's doom is predicted in these words: "Babylon the great is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." The blaze of fire destroying the town is a vision of the apocalypse again showing the influence of Biblical sources as is the idea of the rich being destroyed and the poor rising out of it pure in body and mind. The poem therefore links up social and religious ideas as embodied in Rastafarian principles.

4.3.4 Drum Poetry

"Wings of a Dove" is from the "Rights of Passage" volume of the *Arrivants* trilogy, and first appeared in 1967. The title of the poem is from the first line of a popular ska tune of the early sixties which begins, "If I had the wings of a dove, I would like to fly away and be at rest." The song echoes a line from the *Psalms* and has also been used by Henry James as the title of one of his novels. This song expresses a yearning for escape also articulated by the Rasta in Brathwaite's poem when imagines he has grown wings to fly away (Rohlehr, "Blues" 72). Rohlehr comments that Brathwaite brings us closer to the Rastafarian experience by creating the drum rhythms of the cult (73). The music closely associated with Rastas is reggae in which a heartbeat rhythm is played on a kettledrum as an accompaniment to mournful lyrics on the theme of hardship and protest. The ska tune from which the title derives also has a quick lively 1-2-1-2 drum-beat and is considered the forerunner of reggae. This drum rhythm is present most clearly in the last section of the poem. Speak out the words "silk dem food dem/ shoe dem wine dem" and you will feel that the rhythm underlying them is that of the heartbeat. One of the aspects of nation language which Brathwaite mentions in "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature" is the setting up of "certain tunes, tones and rhythms which are characteristic of the folk tradition" (243). The West African connections of Caribbean vocabulary are present in words like "dem" and the call and response pattern is evoked by "na." The folk theme, rhythm, syntax and vocabulary make this poem a creative exposition of Brathwaite's theoretical formulation "nation language."

4.4 ANANSE

4.4.1 Folk Imagination

Anancy or Ananse as Brathwaite chooses to call him is the cunning trickster hero of a number of Caribbean folktales in which he appears as a mythical spider in a human form. Derived from West African culture especially that of the Akans in Ghana, the folklore associated with this figure is called *Anansesem*. By using the African spelling for the name of this figure Brathwaite seems to be highlighting its African origins. This is not surprising considering the author spent eight years in Ghana working with the Ministry of Education. In that country the person who has done the most to popularise Ananse lore is the theatre activist and folklorist Efua Sutherland. In her play *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) and *Anansegoro* (plays based on the Ananse stories) she has sought to make the exploits of this figure contemporary. In the conclusion to the play she observes, "That Ananse is, artistically, a medium for society to criticise itself can be seen in the expression 'Exterminate Ananse, and

society will be ruined.'" The association of Ananse with the power of words (folktales are passed by word of mouth and Ananse usually talks himself out of a tricky situation in them) and the impact of words in changing the course of history is the focus of this poem.

Significantly Brathwaite aligns Ananse with Legba, regulating deity of communication between humans and gods, patron of metamorphosis, transition, and uncertainty in West African mythology. There is no direct mention of Legba in the poem but frequent references about lameness confirm the presence of this aged, lame, hunch-backed or one-legged god. Ananse is the culture-hero of intelligence and common-sense and hence has the ability to triumph over disabilities. This wit is the gift of Onyame, the Akan Supreme Divinity. Legba is quintessentially located at transition points of time and space. In fusing the two figures the poet is probably seeking the elevation of a folkloric figure to mythical dimensions and hence striving "to rehabilitate the significance of the lowly creature . . . [to] become an icon charged with transformative potential" (Warner-Lewis 59). This also enhances the social relevance of Ananse particularly in the Caribbean which has been the site of transformative disruptions like revolts and rebellions. Brathwaite's reclamation of Anancy from the African to the Caribbean scenario is in the tradition of folklorists and creative writers like Louise Bennett and Andrew Salkey who have retold the exploits of this trickster as children's tales. John Figueroa's rendering aptly sums up this reclamation:

> Anancy is a spider;
> Anancy is a man;
> Anancy's a West Indian
> And West African.

4.4.2 The Text

Ananse

With a black snake's un-
winking eye
thinking thinking through glass
through quartz

quarries of stony water
with a doll's liquid gaze, crystal,
his brain green, a green chrysalis
storing leaves,

memories trunked up in a dark attic,
he stumps up the stares
of our windows, he stares, stares
he squats on the tips

of our language
black burr of conundrums
eye corner of ghosts, ancient his-
tories;

he spins drum-
beats, silver skin
webs of sound
through the villages;

Tacky heard him
and L'Ouverture

all the hung-
ry dumb-bellied chieftains

who spat
their death into the ground:
Goave, Port-au-Prince, Half Moon Fort,
villages,

dead lobster-pot crews,
wire, red sea shells, coconut trees' hulls, nodding skulls,
black iron bells, clogged,
no glamour of noon on the man-

grove shore.
Now the poor hang him up in the ceiling,
their brooms cannot reach his hushed corner
and he sits with the dust, desert's rainfall of soot,
plotting a new fall from heaven

threading
threading
the moon
moonlight storie

his full mouth agape
a black pot
grinning
grinning

round fire that boils in his belly
walloboa wood words,
eyes, fireflies, sparks,
crashing coals' waterfalls,

grey ashes aroused,
old men's ghosts,
cinders,
burnt memories' eyes in the hot hut,

flesh,
curling silver,
revealing their shadows of meaning
as the god stares down,

black beating heart of him breathing
breathing
consuming our wood
and the words of our houses
black iron-eye'd eater, the many-eye'd maker,
creator,
dry stony world-maker, word-breaker,
creator...

In the yard the dog barks at the stranger.

Glossary

quartz: mineral crystallising in the shape of prisms

eryscal: clear transparent ice like muneral found in rocks

chrysalis:	form taken by an insect while developing hence preparatory or transition state
stares:	probably a homophone (words identical in sound but not in meaning, origin or spelling) for "stairs"
conundrums:	riddle with a pun in the answer
Tacky:	leader of a slave rebellion in Jamaica in 1760-61 involving a dozen plantations in the vicinity of St. Mary's Parish in which as many as 400 slaves revolted.
L'Ouverture:	Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of the Haitian revolution from 1792-1804, see Unit 1
lobster-pot:	a trap made of wire netting, designed for catching lobsters on the sea-bed
walloboa wood:	probably wood from the wallaba tree, which is reddish-brown in colour and is widely used for building

4.4.3 Analysis

Ananse is a frozen, inert presence staring through the "glass" and "quartz," and yet the potentiality inherent in the figure is highlighted by the repetition of the word "thinking." This passive state of development is linked to a "chrysalis" which stores leaves in anticipation of growth. Ananse, the culture-hero, is so embedded in the popular imagination that his "reincarnation in the flesh of the living" at opportune moments of history is a distinct possibility (Rohlehr, "Rehumanization" 186). The physical actions of Ananse as spider-man are fused with the verbal dexterity which is his chief characteristic in folk narratives, as is the idea of geographical space with mental space in the formulation "memories trunked up in a dark attic." An attic, a storing area for old, ancestral possessions with memories associated with them, conjures up an idea of a musty, cobweb-filled place, the common haunt of spiders. Ancestral memory is the favourite source of folktales like the ones in which Ananse figures. Much like the objects in an attic it is always at hand and needs only a little effort to be recalled and given a new form such as the one a chrysalis develops into. The memory evoked here is clearly linked to the African heritage the slaves brought with them to the Caribbean. These are the "ancient histories" of various tribes transported *en masse* from Africa who have kept the African connection alive in language through proverbs, riddles, "conundrums." Ananse "spins" riddles which contain traces of an ancient way of life resonant with drums beating to convey messages from one village to another. The connection is reinforced with a linkage of Ananse to Legba whom Brathwaite's notes to *The Arrivants* call "the Dahomean/ Haitian god of the gateway . . . the crucial link between man and the other gods . . ." (273). Ananse's stumping up the "stares," (stairs) of the windows and a mention of his "fall from heaven" stresses his relationship with lame deities, be it Legba from Caribbean mythology or Hephaestus from Greek mythology.

The "reincarnation" of Ananse qualities is to be found in the historical figures of Tacky and L'Ouverture whose exploits in popular slave rebellions occupy the popular imagination as much as Ananse lore. Besides them other "chieftains" also set little value on their life and the names of various places given in the poem carry mnemonic associations of other slave revolts. While history may have glamourised these, Brathwaite's presentation of them is in terms of the human losses suffered about which there is no glamour. Living off the sea for sustenance the "lobster-pot crews" were the first casualities of war, their "nodding skulls" floating on the water,

their lobster traps and fishing vessels made out of coconut trees lying as abandoned as the "black iron bells," remnants of a colonially imposed religion. Intrigue as practised by men like Tacky and L'Ouverture was required for the overthrow of colonial slavery. This is equated with the spider's ability to spin webs which ensnares unsuspecting victims. The "poor," who benefited most from the revolutions, are the keepers of these accounts. Try as they might the future descendants of those emancipated cannot obviate the traces of history: "their brooms cannot reach his hushed corner."

The sustained relevance of Ananse to Caribbean society is in the revolutionary capacity of language. The nets he now weaves are linguistic, the "moonlight stories" are as evocative of ancestral heritage as the "silver skin webs of sound" which were a call to subversive actions. In West African culture traditional story-tellers, *griots*, often narrate stories to a gathering of villagers around a fire. The *griot* is usually considered to be divinely inspired in his narration which transcends the narrative act and becomes the social act of performance. Ananse, the spinner of words brings the community together performing the function of the *griot*. His are "walloboa wood words" describing the Caribbean milieu since the walloboa tree is native to this region. That these words can kindle the latent revolutionary potential is imagistically rendered by an evocation of fire, the symbol of inspiration: "fireflies, sparks,/ crashing coals' waterfalls,// grey ashes aroused. . . ." I mentioned earlier that Brathwaite has collated the figures of Ananse and Hephaestus, the lame Greek god of fire and of crafts. The images of fire just explained are an extension of this linkage. Like Ananse, Hephaestus is a weaver of sorts, he trapped his unfaithful wife Aphrodite with the god Ares in a net of his own devising. Another similarity between the two is their craftsmanship, with "words" in the former case and with objects in the latter.

The "god" who looks down is also Legba, who enables communication between the human and the non-human worlds. When the Ananse tale is recounted the boundaries between these two dimensions collapse, the magical seems real in the narration of the *griot*. One aspect of this figure was manifested in the rebel leaders who are responsible for the Caribbean as it exists today. Hence Ananse is "world-maker" and "creator" in a typically Caribbean sense. But since battles can be fought on the terrain of language Ananse is an epitome of the folk imagination which is instrumental in providing the working features of a language. So he is also a "word-breaker" since the transformation effected in an imposed language is through these features. The scenario of the *griot* narrating stories to the villagers gathered around a fire, which had been bracketed off by the poet's discussion of Ansase's multifacetedness, is evoked in the concluding line of the poem. The dog barking at the "stranger" interrupts the telling of the tale, just as the arrival of colonising "strangers" had disrupted the African culture to which Ananse originally belongs.

4.4.4 Magical Realism

Commenting on *Islands*, the third book of his *Arrivants* trilogy from which this poem is taken, Brathwaite draws attention to it being much more fragmented than the previous two collections. This is because it reflects the "physical and geo-psychic fragmentation of the islands themselves" (Brathwaite, "Interview" 19). The fragmentation is evinced in the heterogeneity of images as in this poem. The boundaries between the natural and the supernatural are collapsed and both are presented without any hierarchical presuppositions on the part of the author. Ananse is at once a common house spider in the homes of the poor people as well as the figure who inspired the heroes of Caribbean history. The various different cultures with their attendant histories (the British Caribbean in Jamaica and the French Caribbean in Haiti) interpenetrate each other within the poem. A similar fusion occurs in the case of folklore and different mythologies such as the Haitian and the Greek evoked through the presence of the gods Legba and Hephaestus. Since the

term magical realism has general reference to fiction and has rarely been applied to poetry, Brathwaite has given his own interpretation of it:

> How the metaphors and images interlock and interweave and interpenetrate each other, so that you increasingly have . . . a seamless kind of poetry, increasing without punctuation, where images inform, flow and influence each other. It is a kind of surrealism as well, but magical realism, I think, is nearer to it, because it is the transformation of reality into the prism of imagination and light.
>
> ("Interview" 22)

I have already explained how the images fuse into one another. Stylistically this is presented by the short lines of the poem running into each other as in this example, "no glamour of noon on man-// grove shore," where the word mangrove broken into two conveys an "osmosis" of human actions into the natural surroundings. This was historically proved by the various battles for freedom fought using guerrilla tactics in which the natural surroundings became an ally. In the last few lines of Brathwaite's comment there is the idea of reality seen through the "prism" of imagination. This is also the idea with which "Ananse" begins. The prismatic qualities of glass, crystal and quartz, mentioned in the first few lines of the poem, in which Ananse is fossilized, waiting to be revitalized through folk memory, poetically render the same image Brathwaite has used in the interview.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

Brathwaite's work as a historian and cultural critic informs his poetry. An awareness of the cultural origins of certain phenomenon like Rastafarianism and figures like Ananse is evinced in their contextualisation both in poetry and prose. These are a medium for the expression of "folk" or people's views on the social reality of their existence. The Rastafarian's critique of materialism and Ananse's ability to inspire historical figures are instances of popular and folk culture playing a decisive role in socio-historical processes. Another aspect of Brathwaite's poetry at this stage is the incorporation of oral rhythms. The free verse pattern he uses facilitates this orality since it allows him to experiment with varying line lengths, some even comprised of one word or one syllable.

The poems from *Masks*, the central volume of the trilogy, express the rootedness of Caribbean culture in Africa through the journey of the Ashanti people in search of a new land. Here the poetic persona returns to the land of his ancestors, a journey which might have influenced the section in Walcott's *Omeros* when Achille in a quest of identity visits the land of his origins and meets his father, Afolabe. Brathwaite's persona in *Masks* undertakes an unsuccessful search for roots:

> I travelled to a distant town
> I could not find my mother
> I could not find my father
> I could not hear the drum
> Whose ancestor am I? (*Arrivants* 125)

Some connectedness with the African past is expressed in the last volume *Islands* in poems like "Ananse," "Vévé" and "Negus," but ultimately it is aspects of the region's degeneration - its racial disharmony, materialist and tourist oriented economy, fraudulent religious cults - which underlie the pessimistic vision with which the trilogy concludes, "making/ with their// rhythms some-/ thing torn// and new" The lack of punctuation at the end of the last verse-line pointing to the continuation of the process of "making" the islands.

4.6 QUESTIONS

Q.1 Compare and contrast Brathwaite's Rastafarian analysis of Jamaican society in "Wings of a Dove" with Walcott's views on Trinidadian society in "The Spoiler's Return."

Q.2 Discuss the oral rhythms incorporated by Brathwaite in his poetry with reference to any two of his poems.

Q.3 Analyse the magical realist elements in "Ananse." Support your answer with detailed textual analysis.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

Brathwaite, Edward. *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*. Oxford: OUP, 1973.

Brathwaite, Kamau. "Metaphors of Underdevelopment: A Proem for Hernan Cortez." Brown 231-53.

Secondary Material

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Rohlehr, Gordon. "Blues and Rebellion: Edward Brahwaite's *Rights of Passage*." *Critics on Caribbean Literature*. Ed. Edward Baugh. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978. 63-74.

-- "The Rehumanization of History: Regeneration of Spirit: Apocalypse and Revolution in Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and *X/Self*." Brown 163-207.

Savory, Elaine. "Wordsongs and Wordwounds/Homecoming: Kamau Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems*." *World Literature Today*. 68 (1994): 750-57.

Warner-Lewis, Maureen. "Africa: Submerged Mother." Brown 52-61.

UNIT 5 (EDWARD) KAMAU BRATHWAITE-II

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 The "Video Style"
5.2 Angel/Engine
  5.2.1 Shango/Ogun
  5.2.2 The Text
  5.2.3 Analysis
  5.2.4 Breathweight
5.3 Stone
  5.3.1 Death of the Author
  5.3.2 The Text
  5.3.3 Analysis
  5.3.4 Performance Poetry
5.4 Colombe
  5.4.1 The Discoverer
  5.4.2 The Text
  5.4.3 Analysis
  5.4.4 Seametrics
5.5 Let Us Sum Up
5.6 Questions
5.7 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

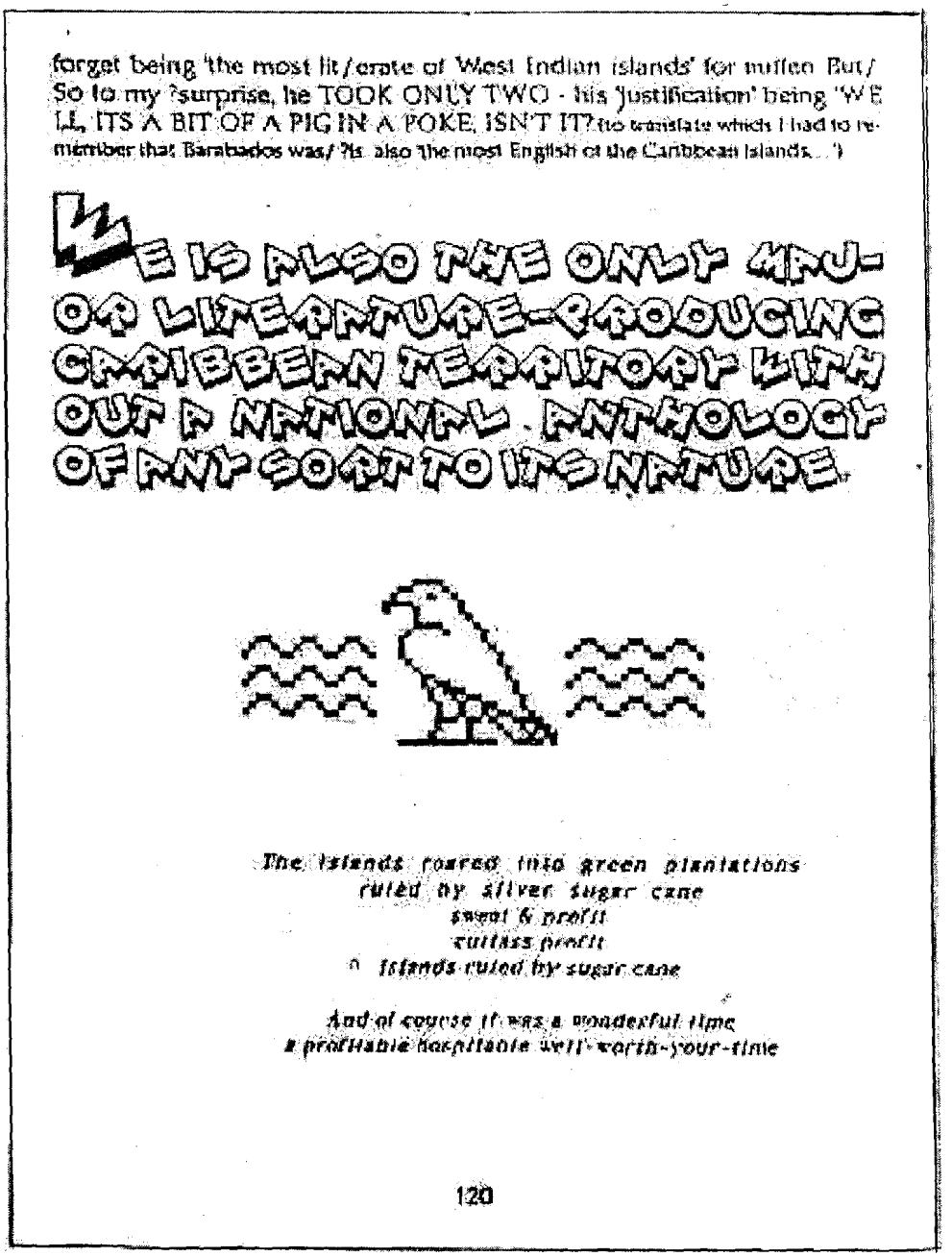
The primary objective of this unit is to familiarise you with poetry from Brathwaite's oeuvre published in his second trilogy and in works of the late 1980s and 1990s. The poetry analysed in this unit is from the collections *Mother Poem* (1977), *Jah Music* (1986) and *Middle Passages* (1993). It demonstrates Brathwaite's broader engagement with Caribbean religious cults, literature and historical antecedents. The unit will also include some details about Brathwaite's recent experiments with poetic forms particularly evident in print and typography.

5.1 THE "VIDEO STYLE"

Reception of Brathwaite's poetry in the eighties and the nineties has shown two contradictory trends. On the one hand he has gained recognition as a poet of international repute and on the other he is finding it increasingly difficult to find publishers for his work. In 1986 he was awarded the Casa de las Américas Prize for Literature for *Roots*, a volume of essays on Caribbean literature and culture. In 1994 he was selected by an international jury of writers as the thirteenth laureate of the Neustadt International Prize for Literature. In the same year the autumn issue of *World Literature Today* was completely devoted to his work and contained articles by internationally renowned critics. It is therefore surprising to learn that many of the writer's completed works, both prose and poetry, have not been accepted for publication on the grounds of there being no market for experimental work.
In my analysis of "Ananse" I had explained how Brathwaite conceives the role of the poet in the Caribbean as similar to that of the *griot* in African cultures. The *griot* is both carver of wood and singer of songs thus combining the aural and visual aspects of creation. Brathwaite speaks of his recent creative output in these terms:

> When I started off, everything I did I read aloud into the tape recorder. I also wanted it to look interesting. Now, with the

computer, I have really gone into that, into what I call my Video style.
I think that oral traditions do have a very strong visual aspect. In the African tradition, they use sculpture. Really, what I'm trying to do is create word-sculptures on the page, but word-song for the ear. (qtd. in Rigby 708)


forget being 'the most lit/erate of West Indian islands' for million But/ So to my 'surprise, he TOOK ONLY TWO - his 'justification' being "WE LL, ITS A BIT OF A PIG IN A POKE, ISN'T IT? (to translate which I had to remember that Barbados was/ 'is also 'the most English of the Caribbean islands...')

HE IS ALSO THE ONLY MAJOR LITERATURE-PRODUCING CARIBBEAN TERRITORY WITHOUT A NATIONAL ANTHOLOGY OF ANY SORT TO ITS NATURE.

The islands roared into green plantations
ruled by silver sugar cane
sweat & profit
ruthless profit
o islands ruled by sugar cane

And of course it was a wonderful time
a profitable hospitable well-worth-your-time

120

From Kamau Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, 1994

The poetry in *The Zea Mexican Diary*, *Middle Passages*, *Barabajan Poems* and the prose of *Dream Stories* is written in this style. Brathwaite's "word sculptures" explore the capacity of the computer to render graphically the nuances of language by experimenting with several font and type styles. The reader is unsettled by the different fonts and types used on the same page to indicate tonal quality. For instance a word spoken in a higher than normal pitch in ordinary conversation might be in large type and be highlighted or italicized. Words are broken, deliberately misspelt, given faulty punctuation, interspersed with brackets, asterisks,

abbreviations and other characteristics deliberately in opposition to the poetic conventions of "Prospero's language." As Elaine Savory has observed, Brathwaite has forwarded the idea of Caliban returning home, linguistically and spiritually, to his mother Sycorax. There is more freedom for Caliban in turning to his mother's language than in using his energy to curse Prospero. He recounts his relationship to the computer, his aide in the reclamation of his mother's language, in "Letter Sycorax" from *Middle Passages*:

Dear *mamma*
i writing you dis letter/wha?
guess what! pun a computer o/kay?
like i jine de mercantilists?
well not quite . . .
if yu cyaan beat prospero
whistle

Brathwaite has spoken of Sycorax as the muse in the computer. This is a playful way of accounting how the computer has become an ally in his poetic challenge to Prospero's world (Savory 228). This extract contains many features of the video style such as the use of italics, slashes and lack of punctuation in the first and last lines. It is, however, fairly close to normal type settings which makes it relatively easy to publish unlike some of Brathwaite's other poems.

Given above is a page from *Barabajan Poems*. You can see for yourself the difficulty which any publisher would face in printing this, and yet, since the work has come out in print, the problems are not as insurmountable as they are made out to be. The reluctance of leading publishing houses like Oxford University Press who were associated with Brathwaite's early work can therefore be seen as Prospero's containment of Caliban's rebellion against language (Savory 221).

5.2 ANGEL/ENGINE

5.2.1 Shango/Ogun

Worship of the Yoruba deities Shango and Ogun is concretised in this poem through the chants of the worshippers and an enactment of possession. The poem captures ideas of transition between the indigenous world and modernity, between the African past and the Caribbean present, as well as the presence of the one in the other. Ogun is the Yoruba patron deity of war, iron and metallic instruments; Shango is the god of the thunderbolt and lightning. Together the Ogun/Shango persona is a spirit of fire, energy and iron resolve in the breasts of the subjugated (Rohlehr, "Rehumanization" 175). In his essay "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature" Brathwaite has outlined the attack launched on African forms of worship and socialization by the plutocracy in colonial times. This was intended to prevent the slaves from grouping as a community. The legislation passed against cults of *Shango* worship, *obeah* and *cumfu* persisted in many Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Surinam even after independence. However, these spiritual traditions have become politically important as defences against oppression in recent times. In this poem the poor woman who joins a worship group is one of the common exploited masses for whom possession by *loas* (gods) is a possible means of escape from her existence.

The setting for the rituals of this worship group is a zionist chapel rather like the one described by Walcott, "a tin-roofed shed in the back of a choirmaster's house, half shango-chapel, half Presbyterian country vestry . . ." ("WTS" 28). Here the repetitive chanting induces a state of transcendence in the chanters. As Brathwaite has explained in *The Arrivants*, possession is induced by the drums or by rhythmic hand-clapping and chanting. The celebrant's body acts as a kind of lightning conductor for god, the "divine electrical charge" becomes grounded so that the earth and the things

of the earth assume a special significance. He also adds that this experience was commonplace in the early Christian churches which, in many ways, were more "African" than "European" (271). The reference to Christianity is significant because of the relationship of some shango cult beliefs to *vodoun* in which Christian saints are merged into the rituals. The title of the poem indicates this by the word "Angel" included in it. The second word of the title refers to the engine of the locomotive which has become one of the guises of Shango, god of thunder and creativity, in the New World. Their almost-similar pronunciation and the slash between them points to the identity-in-difference between the Christian and African forms of worship mentioned by Brathwaite in his notes to *The Arrivants*.

5.2.2 The Text

Angel/Engine

1

The yard around which the smoke circles
is bounded by kitchen, latrine and the wall
of the house where her aunt died, where

her godma brought her up, where she was jumped
upon by her copperskin cousin
driving canemen to work during crop

time, smelling of rum and saltfish;
who gave her two children when, so she say,
her back was turn to the man, when she wasn't lookin.

the children grew up quietly
the boy runnin bout like a pump-
kin vine, the girl name christofene

they went to st saviour primary school
then the boy sit down an win a exam
an gone down de hill to de college.

christie still bout here turnin foolish
she us:ed to help me to sew
an mek up de cloze pun de singer

sewin machine: but she fingers gone dead
and she int got eyes in she head.
then one two tree wutless men come up in here

an impose a pregnant pun she.
one tek
but de other two both foetus dead.

now she sittin up dere wid she hann in she lapp in de corner
rockin sheself in a chair by de window
and as far i know, she too cud be dead

2

i tek up dese days wid de zion
we does meet tuesdee nights in de carpenter shop

praaze be to god
i hear de chapman hall preacher shout out

an i hear de black wings risin
and i feel de black rock rock

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg

praaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg

an i holdin my hands up high in dat place
and de palms turn to

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg

an the fingers flutter an flyin away
an i cryin out

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to
softly

an de softness flyin away

is a black
is a bat
is a flap

o de kerosene lamp

an it spinn
an it spinn
an it spinn-

in rounn
and it stagger-
in down

to a gutter-
in shark
o'de worl'

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg

de tongue curlin back
an muh face flowin empty
all muh skin cradle an crackle an ole

ı is water of wood
ants
crawlin crawlin

i is spiders weavin
away

my ball
headed head

is ancient an
black an it

fall from de top
o de praaaze be to

tree to de rat-
hearted coco-

nut hill.

so uh walk-
in an talk-

in: uh stepp-
in an call-

in thru
echo-

in faces
that barren an bare of my name

thru crick
crack

thru crick
crack

a creak-
in thru crev-

ices, reach-
in for i-

cicle light
who hant me
huh

who haunt me
huh

my head is a cross
is a cross-

road

who hant me

who haunt me
is blue

is a man
is a moo
is a ton ton macou

is a coo
is a cow
is a cow-

itch

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

huh

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hah
is a hearse
is a horse
is a horseman

is a trip
is a trick
is a seamless hiss

that does rattle these i: ron tracks

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

huh

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hah

is a scissors gone *shhaaaa*

under de rattle an pain

i de go
huh

i de go
shhhaaaa

an a black curl callin my name

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

sh

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

shang

praaaze be to
sh

praaaze be to
gg

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

sssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhh

3

an de train comin in wid de rain ...

Glossary

copperskin:	brown-skinned
canemen:	workers in sugarcane plantations
saltfish:	salted dried codfish imported from Canada, historically as standard food for slaves, but currently a valued item in many Caribbean dishes. The word is also used as a derogatory reference to somebody of a low class or character. Both senses are implied here.
Christofene:	creolized version of the name Christophene
wutless:	worthless
zion:	name for nonconformist chapel
chapman:	literally pedlar but probably used here by Brathwaite because of its similarity with chaplain, a clergyman officiating in a private chapel.
flap:	broad hanging piece attached by one side only
shark:	"sharking" in Caribbean vocabulary is a word used for greedy, gluttonous behaviour
water:	a disease which causes swelling of the body with fluid

rat:	a prostitute of the lowest kind
crick crack:	formula used to introduce and end an Anancy story or folktale, in some cases the storyteller first cries out Crick and the audience response is Crack! i.e. Go ahead.
red:	the colour red is a prominent feature of Shango worship
moo:	probably Brathwaite's abbreviation of "moo-moo," a person who is shy or afraid to speak and by extension a stupidly silent person.
ton:	possibly a form of "tonto" meaning foolish
macou:	it is quite likely Brathwaite had in mind "mako," an inquisitive, meddlesome individual
coo:	the word "kuku" was used in W. Africa for a professional cook
cow:	to "work cow" is a phrase implying to work on the side for one's personal gain using the employer's equipment, materials and time.
cow-itch:	a plant with pods densely covered with hair which can cause skin-irritation

5.2.3 Analysis

The "womanist" experience is central to this poem in which the first section mentions a series of relationships between women: the house belongs to the subject's aunt, she was brought up by her "godma" and has a "foolish" daughter named "christofene." The poverty-stricken surroundings are evoked in the first few lines with a mention of the communal yard around which the kitchen, the "latrine" and the house is grouped. The setting is typical of lower working-class neighbourhoods as described in H.G. De Lisser's novels at the turn of the century. De Lisser was a Jamaican novelist whose works *Jane's Career* and *Susan Proudleigh* appeared posthumously in the 1950s. He was one of the few writers to evince interest in working-class female subjects. Brathwaite's exploration of this sensibility shows the influence of this early twentieth century writer. Like De Lisser the women in Brathwaite's poetry are survivors. The unnamed female subject central to this poem lives through orphanage, poverty and sexual exploitation by her drunkard cousin who is probably an overseer at a sugarcane plantation. The low character of this man is indicated not only in the derogatory reference to him as "smelling of rum and saltfish" but also in his use of the woman as an object for his perverse sexual needs. Of the two children she has out of her sexual encounters with him only the girl is identified by name. While the boy is physically and mentally agile and succeeds in winning a scholarship for higher studies, the girl is "foolish" or simple minded. She is another one in the family's line of women taken advantage of by worthless men. That she wasn't always listless and foolish is said so by her mother to whom she was a help in her work of stitching people's clothes. It is only when she loses her child or "foetus," as her mother clinically observes, that she becomes her present self. What happens to the one child she conceived and gave birth to, as the word "tek" indicates, is not made clear. However, from the inactive, depressed state in which she sits by the window in her rocking chair the evident surmise would be that this child too must have died soon after birth.

While the first part alternates between the poet's and his subject's (the woman's) voice, the second section of the poem is entirely the latter's first person account. She describes how she joins a group of worshippers who meet every Tuesday night in a carpenter's shop. The plebian origins of this worship group with a "chapman hall preacher" ensure some kind of solidarity on non-exploitative terms for people like this poor woman. Her experience is interspersed with the chants of the preacher and the congregation. Although she undergoes a transcendental experience in which she feels her fingers reaching towards heaven, she cannot bring herself to join in the chanting. It is almost as if she chokes on the word god, unable to pronounce it, "*praaze be to gg*." Like her fingers she feels her "soft" voice ascending upwards. This she compares to a bat and to the flap of a kerosene lamp. The bat's flight and the flame of the lamp both convey a sense of movement. She experiences possession which might be the result of the chanting she tries to participate in. Her voice raised in praise seems to have acquired a will of its own for it eddies round and round like a whirlpool and then finally descends to the lower depths of this materialistic world. Probably what is being suggested is that worship is a temporary solace and that finally adherents in any belief have to cope with the actualities of the world, however sordid they might be.

This realization taken in conjunction with her inability to articulate the name of "god," whom the others are praising, brings grief to her. Although her tongue curls back to utter the word the effort is a wasted one and brings tears which run down her "crackled," wrinkled skin. She feels that she has incurred the wrath of the deity she is unable to invoke. The feeling of guilt manifests itself in the sensations of her body swelling, ants crawling, getting trapped in a web of her own "weavin" and falling from heights. The call and response pattern of the chanting is indicated through the formula "crick crack." Echoing the preacher's voice the people in the congregation seem to be linked to each other. But this is only a superficial unity, for apart from the name of "god" they do not know each other even by name. In their search for the "light" of belief they are like mice digging upwards from the earth. The woman feels she is haunted by a presence which, going by the colour "red," could be a shango visitation. Rather than feel elated by this experience she feels disturbed, equating this with the presence of an inquisitive, meddlesome, foolish person. The series of images given here is linked by sound rather than strict logic. See for instance the passage in which she calls her visitant a cook and a manipulating person who is as irritating as the "cow-itch" plant. In another passage he is seen in conjunction with images of death: "hearse," "horse," "horseman." The liberation she feels is a "trip" of joy but since it is short-lived it is also a "trick."

An additional association of Shango, linked not only with railroads but more commonly with bursts of rage against dishonesty and injustice, occurs not only in this poem but also in "Word Making Man," a poem from Brathwaite's *Middle Passages*. The last part of the poem stresses these associations repeatedly through the various sound effects. The "rattle and the pain" of this woman is temporarily suspended in the mysticism of possession. Hers is not anger against an unjust society but rather a hope of amelioration. This repository of this hope is the being under whose influence she believes herself to be even if she is not able to utter this deity's name. The god/shango duality becomes an unresolvable choice for her since she is unable to speak either word. The last line of the poem contains a reference to the "train," one of the guises of Shango. It seems to proffer the view that caught between the Christian/African world views, each with their attendant religious beliefs, it is the latter at which people will arrive after achieving some kind of a resolution of these almost contradictory belief systems which are the legacy of colonialism to Caribbean society.

5.2.4 Breathweight

"Angel/Engine" is from the final section of Brathwaite's 1977 collection *Mother Poem*. This section is entitled "Koumfort" and in its the possibility of spiritual

renewal is imagined. Coined from the Haitian creole word for temple, *houmfor*, the title of this section suggests ways in which African connections are preserved (Dash 206). Religion is one such way and this poem details its performative nature primarily through the oral effects captured in it. I have called this section "Breathweight" which is a Brathwaite neologism and a pun on his own name, particularly apt in terms of the way in which his work plays on the voice. The sound of the steam engine hissing is onomatopoeically reproduced in the reiteration of "bub-a-dups." Besides signalling the presence of Shango it probably indicates the location of the area where the meetings of these worshippers are held. I pointed out at the beginning of the analysis that this is a working class neighbourhood. It could well be that it is a shanty town clustered, like many such towns, near the railway tracks. The sound effects interspersed through the poem are also present in the form of explosions of breath: "huh" and "hah." These have been explained as the primal sounds of the *loa*'s lovemaking and as the early stages of divine language when "words were breathed sounds scarcely differentiated from one another" (Rohelehr, "Rehumanization" 199). Under the influence of the *loa*, vocabulary becomes monosyllabically primal. As the woman becomes completely possessed by the *loa* her voice is subsumed until towards the end the hissing sound has only Shango as its referent.

5.3 STONE

5.3.1 Death of the Author

Political censorship and violence is a feature of contemporary Caribbean culture. Martin Carter of Guyana, an activist, poet and historian has described how he was arrested in Trinidad and later extradited to Guyana, his native country, only to face three months at a detention camp. This was in 1953 when Britain imposed direct rule on Guyana. Carter's *Poems of Resistance*, published in 1954, arose out of this experience of persecution for his nationalist political activities. Edgar Mittleholzer from British Guiana faced rejection slips from his British publishers for nearly twelve years. He had attempted suicide in 1936. Eric Roach of Trinidad who wrote lyric poetry with peasants as his subjects swam out to sea in 1974. The bomb which killed the radical Guyanese historian Walter Rodney in 1980 was labelled a successful suicide attempt by the authorities. In an address given at the Guyana Prize for Literature, 1987, Gordon Rohlehr commented on the detrimental effect of the Caribbean social, political and cultural conditions on writers: "Under such states, such unchange, some writers have chosen the amnesia of alcohol. Others, like Mittleholzer, Leroy Calliste, Eric Roach, the painter and folklorist Harold Simmons, committed suicide by rope, poison, the knife or fire" (qtd. in Markham 40). I use the word "Death" in the title of this section not metaphorically (as in Roland Barthes's essay with the same title) but literally. Silencing here is not only by the imposition of censorship and publishing restrictions but more often by the death, self-imposed or murderous, of the author.

The life and career of Michael or Mikey Smith (1954-83) prove that even death may not succeed in silencing a revolutionary voice. Smith was born in Kingston, Jamaica and came from a working class background (his father was a mason and his mother a factory worker). Although he claimed to have been educated on the streets he did graduate from the Jamaican School of Drama in 1980. There he used to "hang out" a lot with Brathwaite with whom he became, in Brathwaite's own words, "quite close" as a student. Smith's rise as a performer of his own work was meteoric. He performed at the Carifesta (Caribbean Festival of Arts) in Barbados in 1981, at the First International Bookfair of Radical Black and Third World Books in London in 1982, did a B.B.C. commentary and a UNESCO performance in Paris in the same year. On 17 August 1983 he was stoned to death by four men at Stony Hill, St. Andrew, Jamaica, during the election campaign. Brathwaite's poem "Stone" from the 1986 collection *Jah Music* is a tribute to Mikey Smith. In the same year Race Today

Publishers published a collection of Smith's work, *It A Come*, selected and introduced by the Jamaican poet Mervyn Morris. Records of Smith's performances specially "Mi Cyaan Believe It," his film for the BBC along with Brathwaite's poem and Morris's collection of his work, ensure that death has not silenced his voice which continues to influence poets and performers.

5.3.2 The Text

Stone
(for Mikey Smith)

When the stone fall that morning out of the johncrow sky
if was not dark at first, that opening on to the red sea sky
but something in my mouth like feathers. blue like bubbles and light
carrying signals & planets & the sliding curve of the world like a water
picture
in a raindrop when the pressure drop

When the stone fall that morning i
couldn't cry out because my mouth was full of beast & plunder
as if i was gnashing badwords among tombstones
as if angry water was beating up against the curbstones of the
palisadoes
as if that road up Stony Hill round the bend by the churchyard on the
way to the

post office was a bad bad dream and the dream was on fire all the way
past the
white houses higher up the hill and the ogogs bark
ing all teeth & furnace and my mother like she upside down up a
tree like
she was screaming and nobody i could hear could hear a word i
shouting
even though there were so many poems left and the tape was switched
on &running
and the green light was red and they was standing up everywhere in
London
& Amsterdam & at UNESCO in Paris & in West Berlin & clapping &
clapping &
clapping & not a soul on Stony Hill to even say amen. and yet it was
happening happening
the fences began to crack in my skull and there were loud *boodooooongs*
like
guns going off them ole time magnums or like fireworks where I
dreadlocks were in fire
and the gaps where the river coming down and the dry gully where
my teeth used to be
smiling and my tuff gong tongue that used to press against them &
parade pronounciation

now unannounce and like a black wick in i head & dead
and it was like a heavy heavy riddim low down in i belly bleeding dub
and there was like this heavy black dog thumping in i chest & pumping
murdererrrrrrrr

and my throat like dem tie like dem tie a tight tie around it. twist
ing my neck quick crick quick crick and a never wear neck
tie yet and a laughing more blood and spittin out lawwwwwwwwwd
and i two eye lock to the sun and the two sun staring back bright from
the grass and i

bline to de butterfly flittin. but i hear de tread of my heart
the heavy flux of the blood in my veins silver tambourines
closer & closer. st joseph band crashing &
closer & bom sicai sica boom ship bell &
closer & bom sicai sica boom ship bell &
when the saints...

and it was like a wave on Stony Hill caught in a crust of sunlight
and it was like a broken schooner into harbour muffled in the silence
of its wound
and it was like the blue of peace was filling up the heavens with its
thunder
and it was like the wind was growing skin the skin had hard hairs
hardering
it was like Marcus Garvey rising from his coin. stepping towards his
people
crying dark. and every mighty word he trod the ground fell dark &
hole behind
him like it was a scream i did not know and yet it was a scream. my
ears were bleeding
sound. and i was quiet now because i had become that sound

the sunlit morning washed the coral limestone harsh against the soft
volcanic ash
i was & it was slipping past me into water & it was slipping past me
into root
i was & it was slipping past me into flower & it was ripping upward
into shoot
while every tongue in town was lashing me with spit & cutrass wit &
ivy whip &
wrinkle jumbimum. it was like warthog grunting in the ground. and
children run
ning down the hill run right on through the splashes
that my breathing made when it was howl & red & bubble and sparrow

twits pluck tic & tapeworm from the grass
as if i-man did never have no face as if i-man did never in this place

When the stone fell that morning out of the johncrow sky
i could not hold it back or black it back or block it off or limp away
or roll it from me into memory or light or rock it steady into night be
cause it builds me now and fills my blood with deaf my bone with dumb &

lawwww

dreadlocks:	members of the Rastafarian cult usually wear their hair uncut and falling in long, plaited or matted locks about their shoulders.
dub:	dub music has a two beat rhythm and is associated with Black folk-culture in the Caribbean.
tambourines:	small drum held in the hand with loose jingling metal discs.
band:	at Carnival a group of masqueraders in highly ornate costumes illustrating in particular sections a particular theme (historical, topical or imaginary). They jump through the streets to the music of a steelband.
boom:	a big bass drum used by masquerade bands
schooner:	a ship with more than one mast
Marcus Garvey:	founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica in 1914. It was later based in USA and gave rise to Garvey's 1922 'Back-to-Africa' repatriation movement.
cutrass:	probably 'cutlass,' a labourer's tool for cutting cane, bush, etc.
wrinkle jumbimum:	a jumbi is an evil spirit of the dead that assumes human form. In the story "Ol Higue," a Guyanese folktale retold by Ralph Prince, an old woman "wrinkled skin Becky Winter" sheds her skin every night to suck the blood of children.
warthog:	a large-headed African swine

5.3.3 Analysis

The poet assumes the persona of Mikey Smith to present the last moments of his life when he was stoned to death. Nature assumes a predatory aspect, the sky is first called threatening or "johncrow" and then later, when the stone comes flying through it, "red sea sky." I think here the allusion is to the waters of the Red Sea parting to allow the Israelites to pass through and then closing in to drown the Pharaoh's soldiers pursuing them. Besides the Biblical allusion the colour "red" also assumes symbolic significance because of the perpetration of violence on the individual whose thoughts constitute the poem. Before the stone hit him there was no darkness but rather a feeling of peace, almost ecstasy, which is compard to a microcosmic view of the world reflected in a drop of water as it falls from the sky.

The persona describes how he was not able to articulate the pain he felt that morning because he seemed to be choking on all the anger, rage, resentment he had within him. The futility of these emotional outbursts against injustice, which Smith expressed in his poetry, is captured in the words "gnashing badwords among tombstones." Other images used to describe the same feelings are: water beating against barriers and the dogs barking with nobody paying any attention to them. This refers to the social and political implications of Smith's poetry which dealt with issues like poverty, education, exploitation of the lower classes, and materialism in contemporary society. The most powerful image conveying futility in the poem is that of the mother hanging upside down from a tree with nobody paying any attention

to her screams. Please recall that Smith's mother was a factory worker, so this image is probably meant to convey the hapless life-in-death existence of all working class women in general. Looking at this sight the poet "shouts" out his indignation (in verse) but it seems as if his words are wasted, "nobody i could hear could hear a word i shouting." These would also have been the themes of his future poetry had he been given a chance to keep "the tape . . . switched on and running." Smith had performed his poetry all over Europe and had also given a performance for the UNESCO in 1982. The acclaim he received there is indicated by the reiteration of the word "clapping." This is contrasted with the silence on Stony Hill where there is nobody to pronounce even a blessing on the dying man.

The last moments of Smith's life are described by him in terms of a release of all the emotions which were expressed in his poetry. Fences cracking, guns going off, a river rushing down a gully, dreadlocks on fire are images used to convey both the physical and the emotional effects of the attack. The blood running inside his mouth is like a river flowing down; his tongue has lost its power to speak with the emphasis it previously had. Like a dysfunctional instrument it now has the power only to "unannounce." The only word which comes out, in a "heavy riddim" from the guts, is "murdererrrrrrrr." Life ebbing out of him is experienced as somebody slowly twisting his neck so that the only activity possible is spitting out the blood and uttering the name of the lord. Nature as an unresponsive witness to this act is evinced in the "stare" of the sun and the "flittin" of the butterfly. In these few moments before death he becomes acutely conscious of usually unnoticed functions like the flow of blood in the veins. This natural bodily music is like the music played by "bands" at Carnival. The masqueraders in Carnival select a particular theme each year whether historical, topical or imaginary. Smith imagines that the band whose music he hears has selected a nautical theme. The noise of the ship bells reproduced in the poem is a reverberation of the sound of his own bodily functions heard by the dying man. Wave-like, the music rises only to hit against the "broken schooner" of his injured body seeking its "harbour."

The sense of peace which he now feels outside is also within him. Experiencing oneness with the elements of nature he speaks of the wind as a tangible presence much like Marcus Garvey come alive. An affinity with Garvey is stressed because of his emphasis on social reform and on Africa as a means of asserting Black identity. Garvey's ideas were considered the precursor of the Rastafarian movement. Smith's links with the Rastas are evinced throughout the poem in his use of the pronoun "i" and a mention of "dreadlocks." Garvey's words did have an effect on people's minds in his times and on subsequent generations. This is presented as his "mighty word[s]" making holes in the ground he trod upon. It impinges upon Smith's consciousness like a "scream" quite unlike his own scream in the first half of the poem which is not heard by anybody. In a way Garvey's demands for social justice and equality were echoed by Smith. He becomes conscious of this only in the moment when his ears "bleed" or are full of sounds which had an impact on him and he recognises "i had become that sound."

Throughout my analysis of the poem I have emphasised how the elements are invested with the emotions of the dying man. These last few lines which I will now discuss reinforce this theme. Fire, water and air are the three elements the poet has already touched upon. Now it is the earth or rather the "soft volcanic ash" which he sees as having regenerative potential. While nature follows its own course, giving rise to life in the form of flowers and other plants, it is men who deviate from the natural course of their lives to attack others. These attacks can be verbally or actively vicious. No poet with a reformist agenda can please everybody. It is to his detractors, who attacked him with a violent "wit" and with threats of possession by "jumbis" or evil spirits, that these lines are directed. They are labelled "warthogs" snouting around for something they can take offence at. Idyllic scenes of children running, birds twittering are juxtaposed against his own agonised breathing which is more like a howl. The birds are as indifferent to his plight as if he never existed. Towards the end of the poem it is the inevitability of the attack which is highlighted:

"i could not hold it back or black it. . . ." The coming together of the object as well as the subject of attack concludes the poem. Unlike an imaginative perception which the poet can retain in his memory and later transmute into poetry, the stone is a concrete material object which leads to the physical effects of impairment and finally death. It is significant that the Smith persona in this poem does not directly affix the blame on his attackers. The stone, from being the instrument of death, comes to epitomise the condition of the man who has died since he becomes as inanimate as it: "i am the stone that kills me."

5.3.4 Peformance Poetry

In the Caribbean, poetry is not just words printed on a page but also spoken aloud for an audience. There has been a tradition of poets teaming up with musicians for performances. Even the deejays, who erase the words from records, retaining the music to improvise the words as they perform, have been labelled as poets. Michael Smith belonged to a group of poet-performers called "dub poets" by the British Caribbean performer Linton Kwesi Johnson. Dub poetry is characterised by lines meant to be spoken, generally to a two-beat rhythm, dealing mostly with the life experiences or point of view of Black people. The most celebrated example is Smith's frequently anthologised poem "Me Cyaan Believe It." I give below a few lines from it:

Me seh me cyaan believe it
Me seh me cyaan believe it
Room dem a rent
me apply widin
but as me go een
cockroach rat and scorpion
also come een

(*Hinterland* 286)

If you read these lines aloud you will be able to get some idea of its beat. As is apparent the lines are about a poor man forced to rent a room (probably in a tenement) infested with insects and animals. It is in this poem that Smith uses the technique Brathwaite has incorporated in his tribute to him: "But me know yuh believe it/ Lawwwwwwwwd/ me know yuh believe it." Elsewhere Brathwaite has commented on Smith's remarkable voice and breath control on stage accompanied by the "decorative" noise of the Japanese S90 motorbike: "On the page, Smith's *Lawwwwwwwwd* is the S-90" ("History" 301). Not only is this reproduced in this poem but it is also added to when Brathwaite makes the Smith persona pronounce "murdererrrrrrrr." The inclusion of these sound effects is Brathwaite's tribute to the performative aspect of poetry epitomised by Michael Smith.

5.4 COLOMBE

5.4.1 The Discoverer

Christopher Columbus (in Spanish, Cristobal Colon) 'discovered' the New World on October 12, 1492 when he landed on an island called Guanahani by the Indians and named San Salvador by him. It is this moment which is the subject of this poem. The poem is from Brathwaite's 1992 collection *Middle Passages*, the year which marked the Columbus quincentennial 'celebrations.' These were embroiled in controversy following protests by native Americans for whom the discovery had also meant extermination. As far back as 1967 Naipaul had written an article "Columbus and Crusoe" in which he had commented with characteristic irony: "He [Columbus] claimed . . . that he had got rid of two-thirds of the natives of Hispaniola in two years; the remainder had been set to gathering gold dust. (This was an exaggeration : he

had only got rid of a third)" (221). The beginnings of this moment which inaugurated New World history for Europe is delineated in Brathwaite's poem.

The figure of Columbus, like that of Crusoe, has held a special attraction for Caribbean writers. Brathwaite himself has used the Columbus motif in many poems in *The Arrivants*. As Simon Gikandi has observed: given the consequences of European "modernization" of the New World, it appears almost impossible for Caribbean writers to accept Todorov's claim that "we are all direct descendants of Columbus" and that "it is with him that our genealogy begins" (2). The claims to modernization and discovery made on behalf of Columbus's arrival are all more problematic considering the fact that it was by accident that he came here. He had originally set out to reach Asia by a Western route. To add to this was the fact that his motives were openly mercenary, only tangentially geographical and civilizational only in so far as they helped further the former. This should put to rest any Eurocentric assumptions about Columbus's arrival being universally beneficial and hence a cause of 'celebration.'

5.4.2 The Text

"Colombe"

C
olumbus from his after-
deck watched stars, absorbed in water,
melt in liquid amber drifting
through my summer air
Now with morning shadows lifting
beaches stretched before him cold & clear
Birds circled flapping flag & mizzen
mast. Birds harshly hawking. without fear
Discovery he sailed for. was so near.

C
olumbus from his after-
deck watched heights he hoped for
rocks he dreamed. rise solid from my simple water
Parrots screamed. Soon he would touch
our land. his charted mind's desire
The blue sky blessed the morning with its fire
But did his vision
fashion as he watched the shore
the slaughter that his soldiers
furthered here? Pike
point & musket butt
hot splintered courage. Bones
cracked with bullet shot
tipped black boot in my belly. The
whips uncurled desire?

C
olumbus from his after-
deck saw bearded fig trees. Yellow pouis
blazed like pollen & thin
waterfalls suspended in the green
as his eyes climbed towards the highest ridges
where our farms were hidden
Now he was sure
he heard soft voices mocking in the leaves
What did this journey mean. this
new world mean. dis
covery? or a return to terrors
he had sailed from. Known before?
I watch him pause
Then he was splashing silence
Crabs snapped their claws
And scattered as he walked towards our shore

Glossary

afterdeck:	deck near the rear portion of a ship
amber:	yellow coloured
mizzen mast:	mast next to the rear of the main mast
hawking:	flying with the intention of preying on other birds
Pike:	long wooden shaft with pointed metal head
musket:	gun
bearded fig tree:	a tree with fig like berries, called bearded because of the resemblance of its hanging aerial roots to beards
pouis:	a large decorative tree which sheds its leaves and flowers annually

5.4.3 Analysis

The letter "C" in bold type with which each stanza of the poem is superscribed is apparently formed by splitting Columbus's name so that all three stanzas begin with "olumbus." Not only is the letter "C" indicative of the name of the explorer but also of the region he claimed to have discovered: the Caribbean. It also has the same pronounciation as "sea," on which the discoverer sailed to come to this region. Brathwaite's play with language acquires other dimensions if the world "olumbus" is broken into its constituent words, each of which has a typically Caribbean meaning. It can be seen to be made up of "ol," "um" and "bus." Take the first word which means old and implies that Columbus was in his old age when he discovered the region. This is historically accurate for his date of birth is usually taken to be c.1445 which means that he was approaching old age when he landed at San Salvador in 1492. The second constituent "um" is creole for the third person pronoun 'him,' sometimes used derogatively. The last word "bus" is a shortened form of "bluss" meaning to deliver a sudden blow, cut, wound or whip. Taken together these words posit Columbus as the perpetrator of violence which is elaborated upon in the second stanza.

The idea of peace conveyed through Columbus's observation of the stars reflected in the sea gives a false sense of security. Towards morning the sight of the beaches a little distance away marks the goal of his voyage. The poem is from the perspective of a native inhabitant of the area discovered by the voyager. This Amerindian shifts between the first person singular and plural pronouns, "my" and "our," to describe the devastation wreaked on his land and its inhabitants. It is therefore curious to observe that Columbus's anticipation and expectation is also vividly presented in the poem. The Amerindian persona clearly has an omniscient perspective. That the scenario would be a wish fulfilment fantasy for Columbus is borne out by the words that the land is "his charted mind's desire." An idyllic sunrise in the blue skies, the sight of trees native to the region (bearded fig and poius), the gushing waterfalls are all a fulfilment of his exotic imaginings. This exoticism is undercut by the harsh reality of the violence unleashed on the natives by the soldiers accompanying and following Columbus. Significantly the weapons used for attack: the pike and the musket emblematise the missile which, in Brathwaite's view, is the governing symbol of Western culture. Needless violence is a prefiguration of colonisalism, "whips uncurled desire."

Even the fulfilment of his longed for dream of discovery does not satisfy Columbus. He imagines he hears voices among the trees which mock his life's endeavour. Breaking the word "discovery" into two Brathwaite changes its sense so that it comes to mean an uncovering of "dis," the underworld in classical mythology. This does not mean that the New World is hellish but rather that the impulse which led Columbus to its search was dark in its origin. If he had undertaken the voyage for a cathartic purpose, to rid himself of whatever was dark or negative in him, then clearly that purpose has been defeated. Like the crabs snapping their claws the colonists reveal the ugly side of human nature when they come in contact with those living on the land they claim to have discovered. It is with this potent image of antagonism embedded in human nature that the poem ends.

5.4.4 Seametrics

A previous version of this poem was published in the first volume of *The Arrivants*. There it is a part of a longer poem from the "Islands and Exiles" section of *Rites of Passage* and is titled "The Emigrants." Like the Caribbean emigrants to first world countries Columbus is seen as an emigrant to the New World, a placing which somehow represses the historical enormity of Columbus's "emigration" for the Amerindians. This is not surprising for at that stage in his career Brathwaite has admitted to "having written a history book which had said there were no Amerindians. . . ." With a change in perspective there came a changed version of the poem. The difference is primarily in the typography. If you look at this poem carefully you will observe that the printed matter tapers upwards from the left and right sides at "c." The last line is longer than the others and forms a kind of a base. Draw lines along the printed matter and observe that the shape is very much like a rocket or a missile. And yet the poem captures the ebb and flow of the sea thematically. Brathwaite has explained this through his concept "seametrics":

> I have a thing that I call seametrics, bcause the sea influences the landscape. The sea influences the nature of poetry--the pauses between the words, the tidalectic nature of the sea; which is differnt from the notion of the dialect of the marksman: all of these things are there in the poetry.
>
> (qtd. in James 763)

While the 'shape' of the poem is that of the marksman, the pike, the bullet, the missle are symbols of an expansionist like Columbus; the rhythm or dialect is that of the sea. This movement of the water backward and forward is expressed through the close and distant scenes which alternate in the poem. From the stars in the water to the heights of the rocks, from the trees near the shore to the "hidden" farms, all are filtered through the consciousness of the Amerindian persona who imagines Columbus observing them. The juxtaposition of an icon of Western civilization with the rhythm of the New World illustrates their encounter in visual and thematic terms.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

I hope you have read Brathwaite's later poetry carefully and now have an idea about the change in his poetic concerns particularly in the eighties and nineties. The diversity of perspectives exhibited is a particularly noticeable feature. Based on an assesment of his first trilogy many commentators had dismissed Brathwaite as a "folk" poet with all the pejorative connotations of parochialism this word seems to have acquired. The selection of poems in this unit is intended to dispel this erroneous notion about his poetry. Freedom from the shackles of pentameter, conventional punctuation, print format and fixed meanings of words through the evolution of a distinct "video style" is evinced in all the poems analysed.

5.6 QUESTIONS

Q.1 How has Brathwaite presented the impact of religion on the sensibility of the common people in "Angel/Engine"?

Q.2 What aspects of the "video style" can you discern in the three poems included in this unit? Examine the politics behind them.

Q.3 Brathwaite often gives us paradigms for an analysis of his own work by coining neologisms. Discuss any two coinages with reference to his poetry.

5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

Brathwaite, Kamau. *Jah Music*. Savacou, 1986.

-- *Middle Passages*. 1992. New York: New Directions, 1993.

-- *Mother Poem*. Oxford: OUP, 1977.

Secondary Material

Dash, J. Michael. "Edward Kamau Brathwaite." *West Indian Literature*. Ed. Bruce King. Sec. ed. London: Macmillan, 1995. 194-208.

James, Cynthia. "The Unknown Text." *World Literature Today*. 68 (1994): 758-64.

Naipaul, V.S. "Columbus and Crusoe." 1967. *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles*. London: Penguin, 1972. 221-25.

Savory, Elaine. "Returning to Sycorax/ Prospero's Response: Kamau Brathwaite's Word Journey." Brown. 208-30.

UNIT 6 THEORETICAL PARADIGMS FOR CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 History
6.2 Intertextuality
6.3 Orality
6.4 Diaspora
6.5 Let Us Sum Up
6.6 Questions
6.7 Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit I shall be providing some theoretical paradigms for Caribbean literature. You have already read about the creative uses of issues like history, orality, intertextuality, diaspora in addition to metaphors drawn from these and other fields of popular culture. I will now summarise their theoretical formulations as provided by Walcott, Brathwaite and other Caribbean and post-colonial writers. Do remember that although Caribbean literature can be discussed under various rubrics these are not mutually exclusive categories. Indeed all of them have points of contact and a work analysed from one of these angles will invariably contain insights of other approaches.

6.1 HISTORY

Michel Foucault first forwarded the idea of history as a disconnected range of discursive practices. Each practice is a set of rules and procedures governing writing and thinking in a particular field. These rules exclude and regulate knowledge and taken together they form a culture's "archive." As Edward Said demonstrated in his highly influential work *Orientalism*, Western discursivity "produced" the Orient or an "idea" of the East based on certain stereotypical representations. An exploration of the history of colonialism and its literary manifestations is one way of examining how power structures discourse. One instance of this is the teleological view of Western historiography which sees Western man's colonising impulse as the historical "origin" of colonial societies, particularly those in the New World.

Caribbean writers have vehemently rejected this idea which not only undermines the cultural diversity of the region by constituting all its inhabitants as colonial subjects but also invests them with the powerlessness accompanying this situation. A rejection of the linearity of history is combined with a negation of its claims to objectivity. Making a connection between history and literature Edouard Glissant comments: "The surface effects of literary realism are the precise equivalent of the historian's claim to pure objectivity" (74). Glissant's theoretical pronouncements on the subject echo, in many ways, Derek Walcott's views in "The Muse of History." Walcott makes a similar comparison, "the method by which we are taught the past, the progress from motive to event, is the same by which we read narrative fiction." Both writers spell out the consequences of such a reading of history in very similar terms:

> In the New World servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters.
> (Walcott, "MH" 39)

> We can be the victims of History when we submit passively to it--never managing to escape its harrowing power. History (like Literature) is capable of quarrying deep within us, as a consciousness or the emergence of a consciousness, as a neurosis (symptom of loss) and a contraction of the self.
> (Glissant 70)

The effects of submission to history are pointed out by both writers: the "recrimination and despair" of the victim spoken of by Walcott is like the "passive" submission which Glissant mentions. These adjectives suggest a torpor and inaction which in its futility is quite like the sound and fury of those who perceive an affirmation of identity to lie in their dismissal of all colonial influences including language. Searching for an alternative tradition they become, in Walcott dismissive words, "the new magnifiers of Africa." This phrase immediately brings to my mind Brathwaite's work. You are already aware of the importance accorded to African traditions by him. For Walcott history "begins" not "ends" with the arrival of migrants rather than European discoverers in the New World. When Brathwaite discusses the African base of Caribbean folk culture or the African presence in Caribbean literature it does seem that he posits Africa as the teleological origin of this region's culture. This view would ignore the cultures of other ethnicities: Amerindian, European, East Asian, Chinese. When one remembers that it is this diversity which Walcott celebrates as "fragments of an epic memory" in his Nobel lecture, his position on the foundations of Caribbean history seems diametrically opposed to Brathwaite's stand on it. Brathwaite's early writings on history and culture are characterised by a distinctly African orientation. *The Development of Creole Society in America* is about the inter-culturation of West African slaves and in part also deals with European adaptations to this "creole" culture. So in its focus on "two cultures" : African and European and their interaction Brathwaite's account can be critiqued on the grounds of ignoring Amerindian influence on creolization. Brathwaite's work is not caught in the despair-recrimination pattern Walcott outlines. And in later essays he has acknowledged the role of other ethnicities on the culture of the Caribbean. *The Arrivants* trilogy is heavily influenced by the author's historical research. An interaction between the two disciplines has, in Brathwaite's poetry, produced a rejection of the "idea of history as time for its original concept as myth, the partial recall of a race" (Walcott "MH"). So you can see that starting from contradictory positions on history, Brathwaite and Walcott's positions on its uses in literature are not very different.

Another Caribbean writer who has written extensively on this issue is George Lamming who, like Walcott and Glissant, forwards the idea of history as the discourse of the powerful. Discrediting the concept of discovery Lamming writes:

> The early European arrivals may look very heroic for what they did. . . . Yet the history of their arrival has been reconstructed in very strange ways, such that there is no greater collection of lies than what has been written about it. Columbus's journal speaks about meeting a Caribbean aboriginal on arrival and conversing with him. Yet, as far as I know, Columbus spoke not a word of any aboriginal Caribbean language, and the aboriginal spoke neither Italian nor Spanish; it is peculiar that they could understand each other: what Columbus really did was to create what he ordered, because he represented power.
> (Lamming, "Concepts" 2)

This has been supported by discursive analyses of Columbus's journals which Peter Hulme has called "by turns a personal memoir, an ethnographic notebook, and a compendium of European fantasies about the Orient: a veritable palimpsest" (367). It contains two distinct discursive networks, a "discourse of Oriental civilization" and a "discourse of savagery." Following Foucault's theories and Said's application of them commentaries like Lamming's and Hulme's have been useful is dis-covering the

assumptions which govern colonial historiography based on accounts like Columbus's journal. Unreliability is embedded in these narratives or as Walcott puts it, history is fiction subject to a "fitful muse, memory." This effectively puts to rest any claims to objectivity and 'truth value.' These insights can be used to study the textuality of history as well as the historicity of texts. Many Caribbean authors draw on historical events for their poetry, prose, drama or criticism. An examination of the sources used, the aspects foregrounded, their choice of genre, the authorial agenda and effective impact can be made to see in what way the work, whether critical or creative, contributes to the revisionist historiographical impulse of new historicism.

6.2 INTERTEXTUALITY

A revisionist agenda is based on the assumption that no text is self-referential. The inter-relationships between various systems of signs and the transposition of one or several of these systems into another is intertextuality at its broadest level. In practice it has always been a part of the production of textuality. Consciously or unconsciously the writer absorbs something from the world and other literary and non-literary texts. Thus many works use historical, political or cultural intertexts. The term was coined by Julia Kristeva in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in which she said, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). The concept has been further elaborated upon by Roland Barthes, Gerard Gennette and Michael Riffaterre.

As has already been indicated in the analysis of Derek Walcott's poetry, many post-colonial writers are using canonical European works as intertexts to subvert colonial discourse and cultural stereotyping. Helen Tiffin calls this "canonical counter-discourse." This project, according to her, involves an investigation of European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space and an intervention in that originary and continuing containment (97). The examples she gives are those of Jean Rhys writing back to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Samuel Selvon to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in *Moses Ascending*. Besides these other Caribbean authors have also used the figure of Crusoe and characters from Shakespeare's plays. In what follows I will explicate this by referring to Miranda from the much reworked play *The Tempest* and to Othello, the "noble Moor" who is the protagonist in Shakespeare's play of the same name.

As the original inhabitant of the island, which Prospero claims as his, Caliban is the colonised native. Prospero's daughter Miranda is silently complicitous in the project of colonisation. The focus of reworkings of this play has been on the self-Other duality of Prospero-Caliban and on the question of the former's language being imparted to and acquired by the latter. In Shakespeare's play Miranda is presented as an object of desire: illegitimate in the case of Caliban and legitimate when Ferdinand woos her. In David Dabydeen's poem "Miranda" a "black bony peasant" fantasies about her but in curiously asexual terms. This is Dabydeen's transformation of the monstrous Caliban whose attempt to rape Miranda invites Prospero's wrath. Here the peasant's dream of Miranda as a maternal figure is the colonial "fantasy" of attachment to and sustenance from the imperial mother, England. She is,

> Sea blue and bountiful
> Beyond supplication or conquest
> A frail slave vessel wracked upon a mere pebble of her promise
> And the sun resumed its cruelty
> And the sun shook with imperial glee
> At the fantasy.
>
> (*Heinemann* 64)

Dabydeen has, in this poem, made a political statement about the exploitation of colonies through the figure of Miranda.

Michael Gilkes in *Prospero's Island* juxtaposes the activities of Ferdinand and Miranda in poems which are titled on their names. The oppositional terms in which

they are described is the reason/imagination, culture/nature, male/female binarism. Ferdinand arrives on the island with his scientific vision and instruments and becomes the "cosmic cartographer" of this New World. Miranda's life on the island with its daily routine of "sand to be swept,/ firewood to fetch" subverts an Edenic view of the island. Her routine is not conducive to the exercise of the imagination:

> But mind, her mind has mountains
> where deep forests grow,
> liana-hung:
> another Eden where, as yet,
> no bird has sung.
>
> (*Arnold Anthology* 556)

In this poem too Miranda is a maternal presence. It is she who comforts Caliban "when he screams" out of fear of the storms at sea. Gilkes establishes Miranda in quintessentially idealised feminine terms. Her appearance has the perfection of girls on tourist brochures; her domestic instincts are manifested in daily chores and taking care of Caliban. Gilkes has at once recuperated Miranda from her role as complicit coloniser in Shakespeare's play and positioned her as entrapped in gender based stereotypical representations.

Sylvia Wynter's afterword, intended as a conclusion to a collection on essays on Caribbean women and literature, interprets this figure from the point of view of metropolitan versus third world feminist discourse. Published in 1990 this essay is titled "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman.'" The "theory speak" of this essay does not make easy reading. Broadly Wynter suggests that the play shows "a mutational shift from the primacy of the *anatomical* model of sexual difference . . . to that of the *physiognomic* model of racial/*cultural* difference" (*Reader* 477). What this means is that there is a substitution of the woman as Other to that of the native as Other. Caliban's physiognomically complementary mate whom Wynter calls "Caliban's Woman" is conspicuous by her absence. This silencing of the "native" woman enables "the partial liberation of Miranda's hitherto stifled speech" (478) and is symptomatic of the power structures inherent in feminist discourse in which the Euro-American intelligentsia dominates and suppresses the discourse of Caribbean and other third world feminists. It is this "demonic ground" which Wynter strives to recover by pointing out Miranda's unsilencing at the expense of Caliban's Woman.

Another instance of canonical counter-discourse evolving a critical paradigm is to be found in Caribbean born British author Caryl Phillips's formulation based on what he perceives to be Othello's function in the Shakespearean play. His work *The European Tribe* has a chapter on Othello, "A Black European Success," which deals with the options for a black person from the colonies who has been made or shaped in the developed world. Othello is a moor in the service of the Venetian state and is made commander of the forces against Cyprus. Phillips comments that the figure of the black person of African origin who is used as a weapon against non-Europeans begins with the figure of Othello (191). Relating this to the hegemonic desire of co-opting black people in a struggle against other black people, he sees this as symptomatic of insecurity at the heart of the hegemonic power (192). Like Caliban, Prospero, Crusoe and Bertha Mason the figures of Miranda and Othello have been used anew to raise gender and racial construction with reference to power relations. Intertextuality in its specific form of canonical counter-discourse is pan-generic. Besides fiction, poetry and drama the scholarly critical essay is another important site from which post-colonial literatures actively engage with Western literary forms of representation. The subversive implications of such an engagement can be spelt out in an analysis of the intertext vis-a-vis the literary or critical text.

6.3 ORALITY

The spoken word can be just as effective a means of subversion as the written word. Walter J. Ong has called the electronic age of telephones, radio, television (we might

add computers to this list) as the age of "secondary orality." It depends on writing and print for its existence and in it orality and literacy exist synchronically (2-3). The Caribban cultural scenario with an interweaving of high and popular culture exhibits what Viv Edwards and Thomas Seinkewicz call the "oral-literate continuum." This continuum recognizes the skills of the oral performer and at the same time does not view literate people as hopelessly cut off from oral skills. Sometimes this is perceived as a divide rather than a continuum then the oral/literary polarity is the creole/English debate outlined in Unit 1. Ong expands the term "verbomotor" first used by Jousse to include all cultures that retain enough oral residue to remain significantly word-attentive in a person-interactive context (67). The calypso with its disputed status as oral poetry is perhaps the most important popular cultural form to emerge out of the Caribbean which illustrates this word-attentiveness.

The origins and subversive satirical effects of calypsos have been spelt out in the discussion on Walcott's poem "The Spoiler's Return." I will here focus on how expressions of popular culture like the calypso thematise the oral/literary polarity. The famous calypso "Dan is the Man in the Van" sung by Mighty Sparrow - he was crowned calypso king four times and was involved in a song feud lasting several months with Lord Melody - outlines this theme. In it a sustained attack is mounted on Cutteridge's *West Indian Readers*, a six-volume textbook widely used in the Caribbean for three decades:

> The poems and the lessons they write and send from
> England
> Impress me they were trying to cultivate comedians
> Comic books made more sense
> You know it was fictitious without pretence
> But like Cutteridge wanted to keep us in ignorance.
>
> Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
> Humpty Dumpty did fall
> Goosey Goosey Gander
> Where shall I wander
> Ding dong dell . . . Pussy in the well
> RIKKI . . . TIKKI TAVI
> Rikki Tikki Tavi
>
> (*Reader* 161)

The English nursery rhymes mentioned in the above passage, meant to be memorised and narrated by children, were transcribed in Cutteridge's *Reader* for the education of Caribban children. The oral is inscribed or as the calypsonian says "written" not with the purpose of imparting knowledge or education but "to keep us in ignorance." Children learning these in schools would, according to Sparrow, grow up to be "damn fool[s]." Sparrow prioritises street smartness and verbal dexterity above a conventional colonial education which has no connection with the Caribbean ethos. The hierarchy of the oral/scribal he establishes is discussed by Brathwaite under the concept and use of the word as revealing itself in "our love of courtroom scenes (both factual and fictional), the rhetoric of yard quarrels, 'word throwings,' tea-meetings and preacher/political orations. The whole tradition of the calypso is based on it" ("African Presence" 240).

The social, communal occasions detailed by Brathwaite attest to the *copia* and agonistic tonality of oral cultures. The calypso relies on repetitive rhythms and competitions in the form of verbal battles are often a source of enjoyment for the public. However with the increasing trans-cultural popularity of Carnival celebrations the calypso form has been appropriated so that it now owes its popularity more to chirographic (written) and secondary oral sources. The publication of "Dan is the Man" in the *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* is a case in point. Record labels vie with each other to offer contracts to calypsonians some of whom have become internationally known.

Myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles which form an inextricable element of the folk culture carry the traces of a primary oral culture with no knowledge of the written word. Their being used in literary and secondary oral forms, much like the calypso, suggests Caribbean culture's embededness in orality. Fiction has drawn heavily on folkloric figures by investing characters with some of their features. Oral forms of expression, be it the calypso or an Anancy folktale, is often used as an intertext by Caribbean writers. Probably an interpretative paradigm based on an oral aesthetic can discuss the transformation of orality in the contemporary context.

6.4 DIASPORA

The diasporic approach to Caribbean literature expressed in critical essays from the turn of the century has drawn on metaphors for interpretation. Whereas the work of post-colonial migrant intellectuals like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Salman Rushdie can prove useful in analysing diasporic literary production in general, one must not forget that Caribbean intellectuals at home and abroad have provided their own interpretative models. Bhabha speaks of the "*metaphoricity* of the peoples of imagined communities - migrant or metropolitan" in "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation." "Their metaphorical movement," according to him, "requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic" (141). This doubleness or their positioning at the interstices of culture is a major theme in literature of the diaspora. In my account of this literature I shall try to show how this metaphoricity has been itself theorised through metaphor by Caribbean writers.

The situation in the Caribbean is more complicated than those of other post-colonial societies with a significant migrant population in metropolitan centres of power. As Stuart Hall has explained, the New World presence is itself the beginning of diaspora, diversity, hybridity and difference, making the Afro-Caribbean people already a part of the diaspora (401). Hall's statement can be extended to include people of all ethnicities in the Caribbean except the Amerindians who are natives of the region. Hall defines the diaspora experience as the "recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity.

. . . a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite difference, by *hybridity*" (402). Since this is by now a commonplace of literary theory one might miss its metaphoricity if one forgets that literally the word diaspora refers to those scattered tribes whose identity can be secured in relation to some sacred homeland. You can see for yourself the similarity between Bhabha's and Hall's formulations: both point out the inbetween-ness of the diasporic experience and see it as an enabling position.

As early as 1957 Edward Brathwaite had said, "the desire (even the need) to migrate is at the heart of West Indian sensibility-whether that migration is in fact or by metaphor" ("Sir Galahad" 7). Brathwaite traces the theme of emigration and/or escape in Caribbean writing as far back as C.L.R. James's *Minty Aley* (1936) and Alfred Mendes's *Black Fauns* (1935). He suggests that it is both the perceived cultural and actual material poverty of the islands that makes authors explore this theme. A way out of this would be to establish connections with the folk culture which can enrich the writer's imagination and establish his (Brathwaite uses the masculine pronoun throughout the essay and discusses only male authors) rootedness in the very culture he desires to escape from. Galahad of Samuel Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* is the figure Brathwaite uses to metaphorically delineate this situation. He concludes that only when the writer gains a sense of community "will Sir Galahad be able to turn and attempt to return to his own native society" ("Sir Galahad" 207). Galahad, the eternal quester of Thomas Malory's *The Death of King Arthur,* transformed to the migrant individual by Selvon becomes, in Brathwaite's essay, the author internally (metaphorically) or externally (spatially) exiled from the islands.

George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* published in 1960 is a non-fictional work about "the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial and exile, from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of Prospero's and his language" (Lamming, *Arnold Anthology* 482). In the same work he has described subjective experiences of migration including his own. He has also spoken of the material impact of this move in terms of publication opportunities for writers and their "hunger for recognition." These imperatives constitute the "pleasure and paradox" of exile, a condition in which the creative imagination continues to be nourished by the place of origin even while acknowledging the possible gains of being situationally, albeit not socially or culturally, metropolitan. More recently Lamming has again spoken of the Caribbean presence in North America and Europe in terms of the metaphorical usage of "frontier," literally meaning the borders of civilization. Whereas colonial history posited the idea of the Caribbean as an imperial frontier, Lamming forwards the idea of the Caribbean presence in cities like Amsterdam, Paris, London, Birmingham, New York and other parts of North America as making these centres into an "external frontier." Reversing the centre-periphery hierarchy Lamming has, in a sense, made the erstwhile centre the outpost or the frontier of a culture originating in the Caribbean ("Concepts" 9). An almost similar overturning of the materially exploitative aspects of colonialism is outlined in Louise Bennett's poem "Colonisation in Reverse":

> What a joyful news, Miss Mattie;
> Ah feel like me heart gwine burs-
> Jamaica people colonizin
> Englan in reverse.
>
> By de hundred, by den tousan,
> From country and from town,
> By de ship-load, by de plane-load,
> Jamaica is Englan boun.
>
> (*Hinterland*, 62)

The above lines express, in nation language, the immigrants arrival to England as a historical revenge. In the same poem she goes on to describe how a woman on dole passes her days, not searching for a job as she is supposed to, but reading "love-story book[s]." A significant Caribbean presence in England has led to British-born or British-based writers of Caribbean descent to be labelled as "Black British," a term which has been rejected by some who are included in it. Some of these are the poets Linton Kwesi Johnson, David Dabydeen, Jean 'Binta' Breeze and Grace Nicols. Within the last few years many anthologies of their work, like the one from which the above lines are taken, have appeared.

The Caribbean authors you have read about in this course: Naipaul, Walcott and Brathwaite are also a part of the Caribbean diaspora. Most of their literary activity has been carried out away from the Caribbean and their works are now published by foreign rather than local publishers. It would be a valuable research exercise to examine whether their later works differ significantly from their early work in keeping with their almost confirmed diasporic status.

6.5 LET US SUM UP

I have attempted to point out a few of the myriad possible approaches to Caribbean literature. This is by no means an exhaustive account and can be supplemented by, for instance, forms of popular culture like music and dance which have been appropriated to analyse literature. Brathwaite's use of the Jazz aesthetic to interpret fiction and Wilson Harris's account of the limbo imagination originating in a popular dance form are only two of many other paradigms. Due to constraints of space and because I have dealt with the connection between music and poetry in previous units I have not outlined these in this unit. However, you can read about them in the books mentioned in the reading list. It would be a fruitful endeavour for you to choose a

poem from the ones you have studied and try to apply more than one of the paradigms suggested here and any other you can think of to appreciate the eclecticism of Caribbean poetry.

6.6 QUESTIONS

Q.1 Suggest any two possible ways of looking at the use of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* in Caribbean literature

Q.2 Spell out the implications of the use of metaphors as frames of interpretation.

Q.3 In what way has modern critical theory facilitated our understanding of literature from erstwhile colonised regions like the Caribbean?

6.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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MAEN-119
New Literatures In English

Block

7

THE SOLID MANDALA

Block Introduction	
UNIT 1	
The Novelist and The Novel	**5**
UNIT 2	
Openings and Preoccupations	**14**
UNIT 3	
Denizens of the Australian Emptiness	**21**
UNIT 4	
Messages in Motifs	**33**
UNIT 5	
Techniques	**42**
UNIT 6	
Perspectives	**49**

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MAEN-119/444

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

There is no dearth of opinions about Patrick White, his place in the Australian literary canon, or the place of *The Solid Mandala* (1966) in his oeuvre. Ken Goodwin in *A History of Australian Literature* (1986) avers that the "eleven published novels of Patrick White constitute the most impressive oeuvre in Australian fiction, a judgement verified by his being the only Australian writer awarded the Nobel Prize". This assessment however elides the early hostile reception to his works in Australia and debates about the 'Australianness' of his writing, which became substantially muted after the award of the Nobel Prize in 1973. George Steiner called *The Solid Mandala* White's "best novel" and White himself has identified it as one of his favorites. Still others, like Marshall A. Best, have seen it as a "worthy 'near miss'- stimulating but not convincing".

Set largely in the fictional suburban milieu of Sarsaparilla, *The Solid Mandala* revolves around the lives and thoughts of Arthur and Waldo Brown. These twins become the focus of a convoluted and textured narrative that can be read from many perspectives. It is hoped that this block will introduce you to some of those readings and help you to make assessments of your own. The text used is the 1969 Penguin edition and all page references are to it.

The Solid Mandala is a challenging novel but it's rewarding to make the effort to become familiar with its nuances at first hand. Making notes as you read and answering the questions given at the end of each unit will help you develop a better personal understanding of the text. It will also enhance your orientation to tackle the assignments and exams.

UNIT 1 THE NOVELIST AND THE NOVEL

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 The Play of Dichotomies
1.2 Insider / Outsider
1.3 *The Solid Mandala*
1.4 Let Us Sum Up
1.5 Questions
1.6 Glossary
1.7 References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to introduce you to Patrick White, to give you some insight into the links between his life and some of the issues that colour his literary status, in general, and *The Solid Mandala*, in particular. This section will, thus, introduce some of the contexts within which a reading of *The Solid Mandala* can be made.

1.1 THE PLAY OF DICHOTOMIES

"The life and novels of Patrick White provide a classic example of the divided loyalties that have afflicted many sensitive Australian writers.", wrote Geoffrey Dutton in *Patrick White* (1962: 5), a study that came out before White published *The Solid Mandala*. The formative years of White's life and literary career were marked by cleavages in expectations and realities that coloured his decision to become a novelist as well as the initial reaction of the Australian reading and critical public to his work.

Patrick White (1912-1990) came from settler stock. His great-grandfather had come to New South Wales in the early nineteenth century and received a grant of Crown land. However, Patrick was born on 28th May, 1912 to Victor White and Ruth Withycombe in London. He grew up in Sydney and studied in Australia till he entered his teens. He writes, "When thirteen I was uprooted from Australia and put at a school at Cheltenham, England, as my mother was of the opinion that what is English is best, and my father, though a chauvinistic Australian, respected most of her caprices" (1990: 40). Near dichotomous pulls, such as these, were to leave their imprint on his sensibility at several junctures in his life.

Reminiscing about his youth, Patrick White comments, "Almost all the Whites remained wedded to the land, and there was something peculiar, even shocking, about any member of the family who left it. To become any kind of artist would have been unthinkable. Like everybody else I was intended for the land, though vaguely I knew this was not to be"(1990: 39-40). On his return to Australia after completing school, White worked for two years as a jackeroo to see if he could adapt himself to "life on the land". His first year left him with the impression that the mountainous terrain of New South Wales was "the bleakest place on earth". Nor did the rough life during his second year in the "flat, blistering north", leave him enamoured of the wild Australian outback or the much celebrated camaraderie of the bush. He says, "The life in itself was not uncongenial, but the talk was endlessly of wool and weather"(1990: 40). During this time, he is said to have first tried his hand at the

novel. His sense of liminality was exacerbated when he found that, "after being a colonial at my English school, I was now a 'Pom' in the ears of my fellow countrymen. I hardly dared open my mouth, and welcomed the opportunity to escape"(1990: 40-41). White was thus caught between a family tradition that linked the career expectations connected with him to the land, and a proclivity that along with his upbringing made "the habit of writing novels" (1990: 40) a vocation that was less forced. The dynamic tension between his exposure to the ethos of the colonial centre and that of the antipodean margin made this situation even more fraught.

White went on to read modern languages at King's College, Cambridge, graduating in 1935. The interest he had taken in the European tradition of Ibsen and Strindberg in his school years was supplemented by his introduction to French and German literature. After graduation, his father agreed to send him an allowance while he tried to make a living out of writing. His writing career started with the publication of smaller pieces in revues and literary magazines. *Happy Valley* (1939) was the first of his novels to be published in London. The novel was eventually accepted by the Viking Press in New York as well. *The Living and the Dead* (1942) like its predecessor appeared both in England and the United States. During the Second World War, White served as an R.A.F. intelligence officer in Africa, the Middle East, the Western Desert and Greece.

The Aunt's Story (1948) was published before he finally returned to set up home at a farm in Castle Hill outside Sydney with his Greek partner, Manoly Lascaris. Interestingly, James Waites notes that White was, in his later years, to describe Manoly as his own "solid mandala". His autobiography pays tribute to Manoly Lascaris as the "small Greek of immense moral strength, who became the central mandala in life's hitherto messy design". (in Joyce, 170)

This was a period marked by several displacements in White's life and career. For a few years he stopped writing. He says of this period, "If anyone mentioned Writing, I would reply: 'Oh one day perhaps.' But I had no real intention of giving the matter sufficient thought. *The Aunt's Story* ... had succeeded with overseas critics, failed as usual with the local ones"(1990: 14). He goes on to reveal what had precipitated this sense of stagnation. "Most of them [Australians] found the book unreadable. Just as our speech was unintelligible during those first years at Castle Hill, I had never felt such a foreigner. The failure of *The Aunt's Story* and the need to learn a language afresh made me wonder if I should ever write another word"(1990: 42-43). However, the reconnaissance into amateur farming and animal breeding couldn't hold him for long, just as his earlier stint as a jackeroo failed to help him develop conventional bonds with the land. He admits quite candidly, "[W]riting novels was the only thing I could do with any degree of success; even if my half-failures were some justification for an otherwise meaningless life"(1990: 15).

White also found himself coming into the open about some other choices, this time with respect to his attitude to Australia and how that would evince itself in his writing. His now famous words about seeing in "all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions... and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves" (1990:15), resound with echoes of the modernist critique of philistinism. It was a critique of "the exaltation of the 'average'" that was to lead to the conceptualisation of *The Tree of Man* as a book in which he wanted to suggest "every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman". At the same time he wanted to "discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people, and incidentally, my own life since my return" (1990:15).

When *The Tree of Man* was published in America in 1955 and in England the following year, it won accolades on both sides of the Atlantic. Australian critics were not as forthcoming. With the exception of Kenneth Slessor who called it a 'timeless

work of art', the reactions were negative. A.D. Hope went as far as to dismiss it as 'illiterate verbal sludge'. White returned the slight by referring to his detractors as 'howling dingoes'. *Voss* (1958) and *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) too drew hostile reactions in Australia and praise outside it. In the autobiographical essay written in association with the Nobel Prize, White reminisced on this trend which showed the first signs of turning with the *The Solid Mandala.*

> Then about 1951 I began writing again, painfully, a novel I called in the beginning *A Life Sentence on Earth*, but which developed into the *The Tree of Man.* Well received in England and the United States, it was greeted with cries of scorn and incredulity in Australia: that somebody, at best a dubious Australian, should flout the naturalistic tradition, or worse, that a member of the grazier class should aspire to a calling which was the prerogative of school-teachers! *Voss*, which followed, fared no better: a newspaper printed its review under the headline *Australia's Most Unreadable Novelist.* In *Riders in the Chariot* it was the scene in which Himmelfarb the Jewish refugee is subjected to a mock crucifixion by the drunken workmates which outraged the blokes and the bluestockings alike. Naturally, 'it couldn't happen here' - except that it does, in all quarters, in many infinitely humiliating ways, as I, a foreigner in my own country, learned from personal experience.
>
> A number of Australians, however, discovered they were able to read a reprint of *The Aunt's Story*, a book which had baffled them when first published after the War, and by the time *The Solid Mandala* appeared, it was realised I might be something they had to put up with. (1990: 43)

In 1964, as the Sydney suburbs began encroaching on the country, White and Manoly shifted to a house by Centennial Park in the heart of the city. This was to remain their home to the end of White's days. He writes, "Looking back, I must also have had an unconscious desire to bring my life full circle by returning to the scenes of my childhood, as well as the conscious wish to extend my range by writing about more sophisticated Australians, as I have done in *The Vivisector* and *The Eye of the Storm*" (1990: 44). Published respectively in 1970 and 1973, these two novels were to lead up to the Nobel Prize in 1973. Since then White published two more novels – *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) and *The Twyborn Affair* (1979) – not to mention the plays, short story collections, verse collections and some of the other writings that constitute his oeuvre. White's participation in the 1972 rally to protect the Centennial Park too saw him emerge as a public figure who joined cause on many issues such as nuclear arms, the monorail and the Bicentenary celebrations. The tide had begun to turn.

1.2 INSIDER / OUTSIDER: SOME PERSPECTVES

White had always felt the insider / outsider dialectic at play in his life – both as a man and as a novelist. His continental education and cultural exposure to the European tradition in modern literature left him out of synch with the cultural ethos and literary traditions evolving in Australia. His years abroad had rendered him, he says,"a foreigner in my own country" (1990: 43). There have been many attempts to analyze "the peculiar mixture of fascination and respect, of hostility and dislike which his work evokes amongst his country men; his own peculiar love-hate relationship with his native Australia"(Driesen, 119).

At times critics have diagnosed the source of the problem as being largely one of form and White's closer familiarity with European literary traditions in genre, subject and stylistics. "White's symbolic novels, with their sometimes slow openings, their many new starts, their frequent time and place shifts, their fastidious fascination with bodily functions and oddities, and their homiletic passages, took some time to gain

acceptance", remarks Ken Goodwin. He argues that White's familiarity with twentieth century French and German experimental writing set him apart from the mould of the social-realist writing that was in vogue during the 1930's in Australia (Goodwin, 167). However, in 'The Prodigal Son', White admits to being consciously "determined to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism"(1990: 16). Joseph Jones also notes how White inspired others like Randolph Stow to depart thematically from an Australian literary tradition that concentrated on "The Spell of the Bush" and "The Great Australian Dream"; soon in their works, "adventures are subordinated to interiorized events"(Jones, 57). "White had offended against the unwritten law of Australianism", writes Geoffrey Dutton, elaborating, "stringy-bark and green-hide may have been the mainstay of Australia, but here was a man insisting that now it is time for imagination and humility to take their place; amongst those who laughed and gave it a fair go he cried out in agony and looked without sentiment at tragedy"(Dutton, 9).

Others see White's inability to capture the zeitgeist of Australia at the heart of the matter. "A vast majority of White's Australian readers would appear to be ambivalent in their acceptance of his work. On the one hand a sense of patriotism prompts them to embrace White as one of their own kind, while on the other their anxiety over the nature of his work gives them cause to be less than enthusiastic in hailing him as a genuine Australian writer"(Singh, 117). Kirpal Singh cites as factors contributing to this phenomenon the "strong influence of a European background" and a "lack of sympathy or lack of a fundamental rapport with the way of life of most Australians"(Singh, 117). He continues, "White's is not merely the case of the alienated artist. For him alienation takes on a greater meaning...White's problem springs from an excruciating dissatisfaction with the superficiality of existence around him...White suffers from an impoverished spiritual kinship with the society in which he lives; both artistically and spiritually White writes in a vacuum"(Singh, 117-8).

Paradoxically, White spelt out that he made it his literary credo, to not only consciously work against the Australian literary tradition that celebrated realism and naturalism, but also that he meant to continue "to people the Australian emptiness in the only way I am able" (1990: 44). What White saw as his oeuvre's greatest strengths were being vaunted as the very sites that undermined his acceptance with the reading and critical public. According to Adrian Mitchell, "White has never been really comfortable, imaginatively, with the local. He has worried at the fact of Australia, and tussled with its spiritual geography, but the strongest statements have again and again been negative"(Mitchell, 15). Who indeed, can forget White's caustic vignette in 'The Prodigal Son' of

> the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes, in which human teeth fall like autumn leaves, the buttocks of cars grow hourly glassier, food means cake and steak, muscles prevail, and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from average nerves (1990: 15)

Cynthia Vanden Driesen attempts to collapse this paradox by placing White within the Jungian framework of mapping the relationship between the artist and the spirit of the epoch. She sees White as being sharply divided from the life of his contemporaries because he purports to respond to what he diagnoses as a deep spiritual need for the 'average' Australian to break free of the hold of materialism and superficiality. Quoting Erich Neumann's elaboration of Jung she posits, "Compensation for the cultural canon means opposition to it – that is opposition to the epoch's consciousness and sense of values. The creative artist whose mission is to compensate for consciousness and the cultural canon is usually an isolated individual who must destroy the old order to make possible the dawn of the new"(Driesen, 121).

How plausible these positions are remains for you to decide. What is even more interesting is how these positions tap into thematic veins in *The Solid Mandala* as it maps the equally paradoxical love-hate relationship between the twins, Waldo and Arthur and obliquely delves into the nature and purpose of art. "The tension in White's relationship with his own country is a revealing facet of that profound quarrel with himself (to adapt Yeats' phrase) out of which his fiction comes" (Barnes, 3).

1.3 *THE SOLID MANDALA*

"In tracing the development of a major writer one perceives continuity as well as growth: each new work is organically related to its predecessors, yet this does not preclude the possibility of surprise.", comments Thelma Herring. She goes on to point out these links when she opines, "Presenting, with a compression equaled only in *The Aunt's Story*, two lives as simple and ordinary to outward view as those of the Parkers in *The Tree of Man*, *The Solid Mandala* uses them to explore further the theme of man's potential divinity already treated on a epic scale in *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*"(Herring, 72). However, even as the novel marks continuities, the points of departure remain significant. Peter Craven notes, "From the late 1960s there was a drift away from the mythopoeic, away from the symbols of the bush country. This is discernable in the later work of Patrick White. *The Solid Mandala* (1966) is a story of two brothers, one cosmically inclined and 'mad', the other schizoid yet 'sane'. The book displays not only White's interest in the ideas of Jung, but his willingness to experiment with black comedy and kitchen-sink realism. After *The Solid Mandala* White never again sounded the biblical note of *The Tree of Man*." (Craven, 46)

One finds in this novel no synoptic vision trying to encompass expansive macrocosms. In the sense that on the surface of it, the novel does not try to hold within its narrative canvas extensive timeframes, an enormous cast of characters or an extremely convoluted widespread narrative. It is concerned with two twins and their consciousness that defines the world they live in and colors their interaction with people. *The Solid Mandala* is about two twins - Waldo and Arthur. However, in a strange and poetic journey, we realize that it can transcend the bounds of their microcosm to envelop more cosmic strains. Into the ostensibly simple tapestry of the lives of two nondescript men from the suburbs of Sydney, are woven threads linked to questions such as the nature of artistic creation, the search for spiritual and emotional wholeness, the holocaust and an impinging ethos of materialism.

The narrative is divided into four unequal parts. Brief opening and closing sections have Mrs. Poulter as the principle actor. According to Thelma Herring, these sections "form a frame which puts the timeless theme in a contemporary context"(Herring, 73). The expository section introduces the bachelor twins through the perspectives of Mrs. Poulter and Mrs. Dun as revealed in a conversation that they have as they ride the bus between Sarsaparilla and Barranugli. The exterior sections impose the outside world's perspectives on the narrative even as it subtly critiques that world's materialistic values and narrowness of vision. The two central parts recount the lives and thoughts of Waldo and Arthur from Waldo's perspective first and then more briefly from Arthur's perspective. These sections deal more extensively with two seemingly antithetical approaches to life in that society, which through the device of the twins, are shown to be also almost inextricably linked.

The narrative takes off with a bus journey in which Mrs. Poulter and Mrs. Dun are introduced directly and the Brown brothers obliquely through their conversation. In this section called 'In the Bus', the Brown brothers are shown stumbling along the road between Barranugli and Sarsaparilla with their blue terriers, Runt and Scruffy. There is a combination of the omniscient narrator commenting on the thoughts and nature of the two women, the women being characterized through their overt actions

and words, as well as the women indirectly characterizing the Browns through their observations.

The narrator hints repetitively at the narrow and materialistic perspectives Mrs. Dun and Mrs. Poulter are able to bring to bear on the things they talk about. For example, when Mrs. Poulter comments that some women end up spending a shilling in order to save the occasional half-penny, the narrator reveals to us how Mrs. Dun mentally fixates on this piece of information. Having made the appropriate calculations for the half-penny, she is fascinated that some women may actually be losing one-and-eleven on a shopping trip between Sarsaparilla and Barranugli. The significance of these minute details in their lives is underscored time and again, throughout this first section. Mrs. Poulter and Mrs. Dun had met for the first time only recently on a similar bus ride, in spite of them both having lived on the same road for years. As they discuss what brought them both to Terminus Road, Mrs. Poulter mentions her neighbours, the Mister Browns. Mrs.Dun is simultaneously put off by the possibility that the Browns may be her social superiors and pacified by the fact that they are from England. The pettiness of her focus is evinced when she picks out for negative comment things like the strangeness of Waldo's name and the fact that the two aged brothers are holding each other's hands. The former is to her indicative of snobbish elitism and the latter of the possible perversity of the two men. Her observations reveal her insecurities and the limited nature of her mental horizons. This section also presents through these two women the socio-cultural frame within which the story of Waldo and Arthur unfolds.

The Brown brothers are concretized by these two ladies as at once repulsive but intriguing, almost hideous and pitiable to the outsider or onlooker. On Mrs. Dun the impression is totally negative. She 'resentfully' notices ' the two old men, stumping, trudging' almost 'tottering' along worn down by 'their age and infirmities' and 'holding each other by the hand' (18-19). The sense of repulsion she feels, but cannot quite quantify, has been echoed earlier in Mr. Poulter's contemptuous dismissal of them as a 'couple of no-hopers with ideas about themselves' (18). Their only demotic ally, Mrs. Poulter, too finds herself unable to go on defending them and disowns them reiterating Mrs. Dun's 'They're nothing to me' (19). The exposition sets the dismal tone for a narrative which reveals, as William Walsh puts it, that the two bothers, "are handcuffed, as they grope down the path negotiating the irregular bricks, by love and hate, memory and genes, horror and misery"(Walsh, 86).

The second and third sections, named 'Waldo' and 'Arthur' respectively tell the same story through two perspectives. Here again the characterization is through a combination of the omniscient narrator commenting mostly on the brother used to focalize the text, direct characterization of the brother concerned through his thoughts and actions and his indirect characterization of the other players in the drama of his life. As in the other sections, even when the author privileges a particular point of view by giving it almost complete say in 'telling' the story, he also uses the omniscient narrator to balance that point of view by revealing its own biases.

Relationships form the thematic content of the two intermediate sections. Thelma Herring points out that one can read the predominant emotion dominating the 'Waldo' section as hatred born of deep seated insecurity and increasing isolation (Herring, 75). Waldo has a deep sense of being chained in a disadvantageous relationship to his twin brother. As a result of this, he either has to suffer being excluded when Arthur is patronizingly preferred over him because of his disability or the equally strong sense of mortification of constantly being associated with Arthur. His greatest sense of humiliation and anger however, is to see Arthur actually doing and surpassing him in the ideas he deems his territory. Thus, that Arthur manages to capture and hold Dulcie's affection, that Arthur reads literary classics and is disturbed by the larger questions of life they raise and that Arthur actually writes, are blows that quite devastate Waldo's construction of a superior self-image in relation to his brother. The loss of this image, both gradually throughout his life and more suddenly

towards the close of his narrative infuse his being with palpable abhorrence for things and people, springing from personal despair as the success and place in life he had envisaged for himself slip further out of his reach.

If hatred for others and an incipient self-hatred are part of Waldo's constitution of himself, then the third section devoted to and entitled 'Arthur' is infused with the thematic concerns of positive relationships and an almost religious spiritual search for wholeness. Most of the episodes that figure in the Waldo section are reinscribed here through the mellow perspective of Arthur. What were sources of humiliation for Waldo, become sources of affection and part of a continued process of personal enlightenment for Arthur.

Although they are twins, and although "the lives of the brothers fused by consent at some points"(81), they are opposites, physically, mentally and spiritually points out Thelma Herring. Waldo is depicted as a pseudo-intellectual, who excels at writing English essays and becomes a librarian. He assumes a sense of superiority that fuels and legitimizes his hatred of and scorn for the people around him. Waldo, however, has aspirations to be a novelist when he eventually hopes to find something to write about. The elitist and esoteric view of art and himself, he holds fails to keep him in touch with the realities that could have nourished his aspirations into fruition. Arthur is portrayed as an alleged simpleton, who is a failure at school except for a surprising flair for figures, becomes a grocer's assistant and humbly accepts the realities around him. He loves and is loved by people (and dogs) and seeks to share a redemptive totality with the lives of those he touches. "Their experiences, however often coincide: they love the same woman (after their different fashions), both write "poems" and read books, each acquires a dog, both on occasion play the woman, both give Mrs. Poulter a "child"(Waldo in the form of a plastic doll, Arthur by accepting the relationship himself), each is accosted by a whore on the night that the Second World War ends, each becomes in a sense the other's murderer." To Mrs. Dun, watching from the bus as they walk hand in hand, "It was difficult to decide which was leading and which was being led. But one was the leader, she could sense"(19). Waldo, of course, believes himself to be the leader, and the protector of Arthur; Arthur feels from the beginning that he is protected, and is the protector of his whole family. (Herring, 73-74). The denouement reveals that both visions of life though seemingly at odds with one another interpenetrate one another, constituting parts of a whole.

The final section, like the opening section, imposes the perspective of the outside world onto the narrative. As in the opening section, the closing section entitled, 'Mrs Poulter and the Zeitgeist' combines negative impressions of the fate of the Brown brothers and a more positive apprehension of the same by Mrs. Poulter. Only this time her perspective holds sway over the denouement giving it a stronger sense of thematic coherence.

To touch upon some more autobiographical and personal notes that impinge upon the book: "White testifies in *Flaws in the Glass* to his own anxiety at the time he was writing *The Solid Mandala*. He and his friend Lascaris had decided to move from "Dog woods," their home of many years, because the suburban nuisances were becoming oppressive. He feared that the uprooting might be fatal to his writing, that *The Solid Mandala* might be his "swan song". Inevitably the novel "was infused with an amount of fatality and f eboding." For those interested in the sources of White's inspiration and possible prototypes of his characters, he identifies the twins as "my two halves," with Waldo as "myself at my coldest and worst." Mrs. Poulter "grew out of" a neighbor lady, and Dulcie "has both the goodness and the smugness of a fulfilled Jewish acquaintance"(Jones, 72-73). Patrick White counted the novel as one among his favorites. "I like *The Aunt's Story* and *The Solid Mandala* best – the first because for so long nobody would pay attention to it,...and *The Solid Mandala* because it's a very personal kind of book, I suppose, and comes closest to what I've wanted."(1990: 21-2)

1.4 LET US SUM UP

Patrick White's life and career as an Australian novelist are marked by paradoxes and tensions that are subtly evinced in his novels in general, and *The Solid Mandala* in particular. The tension between tradition – be it familial or literary – and the proclivities of his individual talent that consciously strove against more rigidly defined horizons of national and literary expectations lead to the paradox of accolades abroad and ambiguity in reception in Australia. *The Solid Mandala* taps in on these ambiguities in its portrayal of the twins –Waldo with his abhorrence of the society in which he lives and fear that it will contaminate his art; Arthur with his love that seeks to open the eyes of people to the potential for redemption and totality.

1.5 QUESTIONS

1. What were the dichotomous pulls that were in play during the formative years of Patrick White the novelist that have a bearing on *The Solid Mandala*?

2. Discuss what you think of some of the positions that have been taken to account for White's paradoxical reception in Australia.

3. Give a brief analysis of the structural and narrative paradoxes in *The Solid Mandala*.

1.6 GLOSSARY

Antipodean margin: Parts of the British Empire on the opposite side of the earth, used to refer to New Zealand and Australia

Black comedy: A type of comedy that employs black, cynical or wry humour

Colonial centre: The centre of colonial power, England

Denouement: The outcome or unraveling of the plot of a narrative

Dialectic: Oppositional ideas or that pervade and unify an argument, work or system

Dingoes: Australian wild dogs, used here metaphorically

Expository section: The initial part of a literary work that explains the situation at the beginning of the narrative action or establishes the context for the action

Jackeroo: Colloquial Australian term for a man arrived from England to gain experience in the bush often as a novice at a sheep or cattle station

Jungian framework: A psychoanalytical framework of criticism that places emphasis on how a work embodies archetypes, the collective unconscious and the spirit of the age

Kitchen-sink realism:	A genre of realism that focuses on the mundane realities of daily existence, having as its setting areas in the home, often the kitchen
Liminality:	The state of being on the border of two conditions and as a result not fully a part of either
Outback:	The sparsely settled flat arid inland area of Australia
Pom:	A derogatory term for an immigrant from Britain still snobbishly clinging to the cultural values of the mother country
The bush:	The Australian wilderness raised to the status of a national myth related to the pioneering ethos of British settlement on the Australian continent
Zeitgeist:	The spirit of an age or the trend of thought and feeling in a period

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UNIT 2 OPENINGS AND PREOCCUPATIONS

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Opening Gestures
2.2 Thematic Preoccupations
2.3 A Sense of Place
2.4 Let Us Sum Up
2.5 Questions
2.6 Glossary
2.7 References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This section attempts to suggest the significance of the epigraphs to the text and briefly go over some of the themes evolved in the text. It also looks at the way Sarsaparilla is evoked as a setting to the text's themes and narratives. The aim is to introduce you to some of the textual frames of reference relevant to making a reading of *The Solid Mandala.*

2.1 OPENING GESTURES

Patrick White places four epigraphs as pointers to chart the course the narrative will take en route its odyssey of exploration. All four of them weave together a similar thread of thought. They are the opening notes to a concerto of the soul that sees the possibility of mandalic totality in putatively mundane marbles, and intimations of salvation in a supposed simpleton. Below I have juxtaposed the epigraphs and some of the observations they have evoked to help you capture the ambience White wished to evoke at the threshold to *The Solid Mandala.*

> *There is another world, but it is in this one*
> Paul Eluard

"Patrick White is pre-eminently a novelist of consciousness. Whatever the archetypal metaphors of the unconscious, whatever the structures of image, symbol or theme from which he or his critics might claim his novels are constructed, they find their meanings outside these closed systems - in the world. The epigraph to *The Solid Mandala* – "There is another world, but it is in this one" – does not necessarily mean that there is some magic or archetypal or even unconscious reality behind these appearances. All possible worlds are immanent to consciousness" (Ashcroft, 124).

"The essential insight, without which all endeavour will be in vain, is that the metaphysical is recognized as illusory. There is no "other world", "no beyond", no "real" world: the "apparent world", our world, transitory, meaningless, continually becoming, never reposing in being, is the only world. ... White's elected characters act out White's struggle to find transcendence which occurs within the world....The god that Arthur sees is...*in* the world" (McCulloch,32-33).

> *It is not outside, it is inside: wholly within.*
> Meister Eckhart

"A whole universe is summoned up in the novel's slim beginning, a world which includes the clotted paddocks of Terminus Row, and the world in which people lived, belonged to Fellowships and Lodges, and are not afraid of electric gadgets. That world is the context for the tragedy of the Browns, parents and children, which is itself a comment on the words of Meister Eckhart quoted as an epigraph, 'It is not outside, it is inside: wholly within'"(Walsh, 86).

> *... yet still I long*
> *for my twin in the sun...*
> Patrick Anderson

"*The Solid Mandala* dramatizes a search for Divinity in the art form itself; it is a quest for wholeness which seeks to contain an energy or power that may ultimately give expression to another world that White perceives as being "inside" and "wholly within" the visible one"(McCulloch, 27). According to McCulloch, the novel postulates "the question of whether or not art is able to constitute the religious activity of man" and that White envisages the "pursuit of the perfect art form, in quest of the marriage between Apollo and Dionysos ("...yet still I long for my twin in the sun")"(McCulloch, 28).

> *It was an old and rather poor church, many of the*
> *ikons were without settings, but such churches are*
> *the best for praying in.*
> Dostoyevsky

Carolyn Bliss posits that in the denouement Arthur becomes a type of Christ-figure. This motif is gradually built up in the text with references to 'The Grand Inquisitor' and the central finale of Arthur's mandala dance that reenacts the Passion of Christ. "Subsequently, he sets Waldo's death on a Thursday and Arthur's reappearance at Mrs. Poulter's on the Saturday. Thus Arthur is absent for the traditional three days, although the timetable of the Passion has been slightly skewed"(Bliss, 112). Bliss reads echoes of the epigraph from Dostoyevsky into the evocation of the police sergeant's memories "of a boyhood smell of cold, almost deserted churches, and old people rising transparent and hopeful, chafing the blood back into their flesh after the sacrament"(313).

2.2 THEMATIC PREOCCUPATIONS

The Solid Mandala, is densely overlaid with thematic interpretations and readings of the narrative. Most of these themes are textually worked out through the twins, Waldo and Arthur. As a result, much overlapping of thematic possibilities takes place. As a framework to explore the possibilities this novel lays open, several of the thematic preoccupations of this novel have been listed. It is for you to add to or take away from this list as your own reading breathes life into this thematic skeleton and fills it out with the flesh and blood of the character's actions and thoughts.

- **The human sense of isolation and the search for meaning.** This constitutes an abiding thematic concern in White's oeuvre. Waldo and Arthur embody an almost Nietzschean theme of the lonely agnostic's agonized quest for the capacity of insight into the very nature of things. Waldo's futile struggle to exert his sense of identity leads him further and further along the path of alienated isolation. Arthur takes up the pursuit of meaning against the enervating rationalism of his family and reaches for a greater understanding of mankind, the nature of existence, pain and totality. He manifests a longing for truths beyond material knowledge - the nature of redemption, the large meaning and design of life. The semi-mystical vortex of the narrative

climaxes at a final epiphany that leaves them both tormented by their vision and humanity.

- **The malaise of empty materialism**. Emotional incapacity, unrequited desire, spiritual numbness, an analysis of social pretensions, the startling human capacity for savagery and hollow narcissism are thematically explored through Waldo and other denizens of Sarsaparilla. Thelma Herring comments about White, "He is still concerned with the necessity for love and humility in human relationships, with the inadequacy of reason and the superiority of the mystic's intuition of reality, but the division into the elect and the damned no longer seems so drastic"(Herring, 72). This is especially seen through White's portrayal of Mrs. Poulter who inhabits the spheres of the enlightened Arthur, as well as the narrowly materialistic and judgmental spheres of Mrs. Dun and her husband. However, McCulloch is of the opinion that the divisions are clearly marked especially in the case of the two protagonists. "Arthur is presented as authentic man, that is archetypal man cleansed of the illusion of culture. He is more truthful than Waldo who represents civilized man. The contrast between the truth of nature and the pretentious lie of civilization can exist as an analogy of contrast between the eternal core of things, and the phenomenal world" (McCulloch, 34)

- **Religion**. "Religion. Yes, that's behind all my books.", averred Patrick White, "What I'm interested in is the relationship between the blundering human being and God.... I think there is a Divine Power, a Creator who has an influence on human beings if they are willing to open up to him"(McGregor, 218). In a letter to Beatson, White explained, "I suppose what I am increasingly trying to do in my books is to give professed unbelievers glimpses of their own unprofessed factor. I believe most people have a religious factor, but are afraid that by admitting it they will forfeit their right to be considered intellectuals"(Beatson, 167). He adds elsewhere, "In my books I have lifted bits from various religions in trying to come to a better understanding; I've made use of religious themes and symbols. Now, as the world becomes more pagan, one has to lead people in the same direction in a different way"(1990, 19). *The Solid Mandala* is suffused with a confluence of religious motifs drawn from across the spectrum of Oriental tantric mandalas to Occidental allusions to Judeo-Christianity. This theme of religious responsibility is played out in the relationship between the two brothers. "White works out an intimate connection of transcendental and rationalistic attitudes in the twins Arthur and Waldo. The intimacy and inescapability of the relationship between them produces a constant and destructive collision of viewpoints, and confronts Arthur again and again with his responsibility toward a temperament hostile to the values his mysticism has led him to cherish. He cannot voluntarily renounce his brother ...because he has not voluntarily taken him on. And it is from this agonizing, tense contiguity of opposites that the book derives part of its disturbing power"(Edgecombe, 62).

- **Failure**. This theme manifests itself variously – as Waldo's sense of failure as a writer, his failure to win Dulcie – quotidian and worldly failure. To this Carolyn Bliss adds, "The failure of love to be strong enough to save is a familiar vehicle for the theme of failure in Patrick White's fiction" (Bliss, 110). Arthur feels this sense of failure when he finds his love fails to integrate Waldo fully into the mandalic dance, to negate the consuming power of Waldo's hatred – spiritual and cosmic failure. White's preoccupation with failure as a theme draws n his belief that, "The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming"(in Joyce, 47).

- **Literary creation.** "The recurring subject in *The Solid Mandala* is literary creation. Arthur's experiences are an enactment of life's essence, its joy and its suffering which ideally could be the source of Waldo's creative literary capacities. But Waldo turns from the source and is left with dry empty form" (McCulloch, 30). McCulloch sees the novel as using Waldo and Arthur as "plausible embodiments of the Apollonian and Dionysian duality" (McCulloch, 28) where Apollo is the god of individuation, dream and illusion, and Dionysos is the god of intoxication and the forces of nature. He goes on, "Waldo is potentially the provider of Apollonian form. Arthur is the source, the wild inebriated Dionysian force that requires form. Waldo must accept Arthur's love, his source, before he can create and become one with the universe. The goal is unity" (McCulloch, 28).

2.3 A SENSE OF PLACE

The imaginary suburbs of Sarsaparilla, which appears also in *Riders in the Chariot* written just before the *The Solid Mandala,* acquire the status of the fictional landscape of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, Joyce's Dublin, Hardy's Wessex or Arundhati Roy's Ayemenem. The role of the everyday folk in Sarsaparilla, like Mr. Poulter or Mrs. Dun, is to represent the dull, commonplace, ignorant averageness that made for 'the Great Australian Emptiness' as White saw it. Sarsaparilla inscapes or captures the sterility and materialism of White's vision of a spiritual wasteland. According to Ken Goodwin, the place is modeled on the Castle Hill suburb, which used to be the home of White and Lascaris before they moved to the heart of the city (Goodwin, 169).

When the narrative opens it is in a "a place once a village now a suburb, in which the remnants of the country die in the suburban landscape"(Walsh, 85). In this mildly caustic idyll of suburban life, Australia is center stage. The larger world impinges in the form of the Jewish question and the allusions to the World War and the holocaust. But these are worked into the lives of the Brown brothers in such a way as to condense the macrocosmic upheavals – such as the holocaust or the Peace - into the microcosms of their personal failures, tragedies of rejection or acceptance. The narrative keeps them within the perspective of the lives of the twins. The Jewish question becomes coalesced with attempts to establish a relationship with Dulcie Feinstein, and the end of the Second World War is marked for both brothers by encounters with prostitutes.

According to Walsh, White evokes "not only the exact registration of the physical appearance of the place, but also a sense of the community's reaction, its ethos and feeling. There is a considerable stress on the rougher and more abrasive elements of Australian common life. The names of the people and places, for example, are redolent of a kind of truculent glumness: Wally Pugh, Mrs. Purves, Mrs. Musto, Mrs. Mutton, Norm Croucher, the dogs Scruffy and Runt, O'Halloran Road, Ada Avenue, Sarsaparilla, Barranugli, Shadbolt Lane, Gippa Gunyan, Mungindribble. The ugliness these names stand for is confirmed by the half aggressive idiom which is the common idiom of communication and the two together convey, negatively and positively, the feeling of a society which is both traditionally and visually uneducated, and possessed of an openness and freedom untrammeled by the weight of an oppressive inheritance" (Walsh, 88). As Mr. Brown said once to Waldo and Arthur, 'There's too much you boys, reared in the light of an empty country, will never understand. There aren't any shadows in Australia. Or discipline. Every man jack can do what he likes' (161).

Sarsaparilla is debunked in the final section when the modern idea of comfort and material progress in the suburbs is reduced to "the electricity...the phone...the electric frying-pan...the telly"(295). It's a closed world, where human relationships

become just habits and the television is a substitute for friends. Mrs. Poulter muses, "If she didn't have any friends without the ones she yarned with over fences, in buses, or the street, she didn't need any. She had the telly, the nice announcers, and world figures in your own lounge. She could afford to mind her own business, without Mrs. Dun reminding her of it"(295). The outer socio-political reality barely impinges on this microcosm of self-complacent containment. The real world is transformed into a hyperreal source of diversion from moments of unpleasantness in local life – for example when Mrs. Poulter's pigs are butchered. Mrs. Poulter waited most for "the real programmes, when they let off one of the bombs, or an aeroplane caught fire at the moment of crashing, or those guerillas they'd collared, of course they were only Orientals, and once it showed you the bodies they'd shot....the news items so real, you only sometimes overheard the squeals of a stuck and bleeding pig"(299). Only after she sees the dead and mutilated Waldo, at the end of the narrative, do these become realities she can connect with; even if in her imagination they metamorphosize into a kind of armageddon. "She knew now. All the films, all the telly, all the black-and-white of the papers was turning real, as the great clouds, the great tanks, ground up groaning over Sarsaparilla....Hope was faint. She knew now. The flat faces of all those Chinese guerillas or Indonesians, it was the same thing, dragged out across the dreadful screen. All those Jews in ovens, that was long ago, but still burning, lying in heaps. Lone women bashed up in Mosman, Marouba, Randwick, places you went only in your sleep"(302).

Veena Noble suggests that "Perhaps the most common theme of Australian literature is the lack of intensity, passion and spiritual consciousness in middle-class life"(Noble, 31). However, this is a theme that has begun to wear thin and sit uneasily with an Australian audience. Adrian Mitchell traces this phenomenon with reference to "that collective state of mind or mindlessness, called Sarsaparilla. When White first began writing of this social territory, his readers shared his savage delight as he slashed his way through the values, the speech patterns, the affectations of mid-suburban Australia. The consensus is that he was wickedly accurate. He had the mannerisms down...and he knew just how to expose the private vulgarities. The public vulgarities were easy game....He had discovered the subtleties of the demotic, he knew the vulnerable spots...he understood the true function of gossip in a social group, the definitions that small talk established.... Sarsaparilla has become a convention"(Mitchell, 14-5). While admitting that White's work has put Australian literature on the world map, Kirpal Singh says that he would not add "that White's work gives us the Australian character or, indeed, is even a representative of Australian society! Even Sarsaparilla which appears to be firmly located as some recognisably Australian suburb could just as well have been situated in any of the big European cities. Subtle nuances and cadences aside, there is nothing particularly Australian in an ethos whose chief characteristics are a vulgarity of living and an emptiness of soul"(Singh, 119).

2.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been given a textual frame of reference within which *The Solid Mandala* can be approached. The epigraphs point towards the leitmotif of a spiritual quest within the quotidian and the themes play upon variations of this leitmotif. The wasteland-like setting against which this narrative is plotted, however, has been a site of criticism of White's vision and presentation of Australia.

2.5 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the significance of the epigraphs to the main narrative.

2. Elaborate on the thematic strands that frame the characters of the twins.

3. Discuss White's comment on the effectiveness of evocation of Sarsaparilla.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Apollo: God of music and light in classical mythology; the symbol of reason and culture manifested in writing as a serene orderly quality

Archetypal: Referring to the concept of recurring archetypes or cross-cultural images, figures or narrative patterns that reflect the collective unconscious

Contiguity: The relation of belonging to the same or associated group

Dionysos: God of wine and revelry; signifying impulsiveness, irrationality and passion in writing

Hyperreal: A term used by Baudrillard to speak of a condition in which the distinctions between real and imagined, reality and illusion are eroded

Leitmotif: Recurring image that subtly unifies a text

Oriental tantric mandalas: Symbols of auspicious wholeness in tantric oriental belief systems such as Buddhism and forms of tantric yoga

Passion of Christ: Suffering of Jesus Christ after the Last Supper and during the Crucifixion

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UNIT 3 DENIZENS OF THE AUSTRALIAN EMPTINESS

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Characterization
3.2 The Core of Reality
  3.2.1 Waldo
  3.2.2 Arthur
3.3 Circles of Existence
  3.3.1 The Inner Circle
  3.3.2 The Outer Circle
3.4 Let Us Sum Up
3.5 Questions
3.6 Glossary
3.7 References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This section will look at some of the premises and practices that underlie White's mode of characterization on a theoretical and pragmatic level. It will also deal with some critical perspectives on White's techniques of characterization and the characters in *The Solid Mandala*. The delineation of characters in the novel will be examined at length.

3.1 CHARACTERIZATION

> "Characters interest me more than situations. I don't think any of my books have what you call plots.... I always think of my novels as being the lives of the characters. I have the same idea with all my books: an attempt to come close to the core of reality, the structure of reality, as opposed to the merely superficial. The realistic novel is remote from art. A novel should heighten life, should give one an illuminating experience; it shouldn't set out what you already know."(1990: 21)

In 'The Prodigal Son' while Patrick White decried "the Great Australian Emptiness", he explains that it "was the exaltation of the 'average' that made him panic and feel impelled to write. So when he began writing his next novel, *The Tree of Man*, his mode of characterization drew on an epistemological stance with reverberations of the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. "Because the void I had to fill was so immense, I wanted to suggest...every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman. But at the same time I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people"(1990: 15). He concluded the autobiographical piece he did on the occasion of the Nobel Prize with the words, "Here I hope to continue living, and while I still have the strength, to people the Australian emptiness in the only way I am able"(1990: 44).

This aspect of White's characterization holds true also for *The Solid Mandala*. The Brown brothers, on the surface of it, are far from extraordinary. And it is this almost nondescript aspect of the brothers that White first presents to the readers in the opening section of the book, where they are apprehended through the eyes of an

'average' suburbanite, Mrs. Dun. The central sections unfold the interior drama of their lives, paradoxically plumbing the mystic depths of Arthur who to an outsider's perspectives seems well below 'average'. Yet it is he who is "the keeper of mandalas"(240).

This is a paradox – of extraordinary ordinariness – that Adrian Mitchell too notes. "White's characters are an extraordinary set of figures, not at all (initially) prepossessing. Most of them ...are awkward, angular, uncomfortable, brittle, though some of the lesser figures may be big, billowy, wheezy...". Mitchell however penetrates this surface reality to ascertain the way character functions in White's novels and comes up with some interesting observations. "My interest is in the nature of character in White's novels. Character, as I read it there, is a "given"; it is fixed right from the beginning. There isn't change in character itself, but change in understanding. The protagonist discovers by painful experience something about the nature and extent of his spiritual resources....But the character of the protagonist does not in itself change. ...Arthur and Waldo Brown dance around each other; they don't evolve, they revolve. White...conceals a relatively simple sense of character within the complexity of his patterns of symbols and metaphors, the literary allusions and the enigma of his mandalas"(Mitchell, 6-8).

Mitchell argues that because of this static characterization, the visionary status of his illuminati or enlightened characters becomes just a verbal artifact. Spiritual perception is rarely reciprocated or acted upon, according to him. "Mrs. Poulter appears to understand Arthur's dance, but that is something we have to take on trust because it doesn't seem to accomplish much. Unless to say that Arthur is sometimes comprehensible. *The Solid Mandala* (1966) measures not only the difference between the twin's knowledge of each other, but perhaps too easily sets up the inadequacy of Waldo's knowledge, the misunderstanding that his kind of intelligence precipitates" (Mitchell, 9). Continuing about White's mode of presentation of his characters Mitchell notes, "We discover that beyond what we might call the poetic excitement of these privileged moments of perception, White will frequently insert his moral visions into the fabric of the story, to explain what the characters cannot explain. Their visions ultimately lack conviction, because they can only be communicated by assertion"(10).

Others too have commented on the forced nature of White's characterization. "His novels tend to move from outer reality into the disturbed or fragmented mind (a process influenced in later works to some extent by his reading of Jung), and, for a few central characters, the unsuccessful spiritual impulse to understanding. Despite the jerkiness of parts of the narrative, the thematic construction is always carefully molded, sometimes seeming to be imposed on the characters irrespective of their natures"(Goodwin, 167). One major reason for this is that the dramatis personae have to function humanly as well as symbolically. Besides which, narrative is filtered through the minds of characters revealing their nature. While Kirpal Singh agrees that White's characters seem "flat, pre-fixed and pre-determined to act out a certain sequence of events" he places this within the classical Aristotelian frame of reference where action has precedence over character. "Like the tragic heroes of ancient Greeks, White's protagonists are consistently exploring and bursting through their hubris to arrive at a newer, fuller, richer, revelation of themselves"(Singh, 120).

3.2 THE CORE OF REALITY

3.2.1 Waldo

Born with his innards twisted, Waldo is emblematized by the taw with a knot at the centre. Tense and rigid, he is an involuted misanthrope marked by a self-enclosed fastidious disgust for people and things. He rejects love and relationships as a sort of threat to his personal identity as a potential artist. Besides a guilt-ridden obsession for

the necessity of loneliness, he is unwilling to yield to sensuousness. His is a retreat into isolation. His powerful egocentricity is not open to compassionate treatment. In the end there is no redemptive transfiguration for him. He strives towards an indelible individuality but ends up with obscurity. His self-limited interest makes him remote and self-absorbed, even callous. "Waldo carries this fierce sense of his own identity and his resistance to the intrusion of others to a point where it is pathological and, since it is invariably connected with self-love, evil. ...he is a spiritual and emotional solipsist. Life and experience seem to him a violation of his enclosed perfection, an assault on his privacy"(Walsh, 93). Moreover, Waldo is even as a youth aware of the malaise that condemns him to anomie. The narrative voice in the novel reveals, "On the whole, though he would only have confessed it to himself, he did not understand people, except those he created by his own imagining. If it hadn't been for his own visions he might have felt desperate"(98).

He resents, but is sustained by his bondage to Arthur. Putatively superior, he fails and ends his life hating Arthur, his only contact with real life. He and Arthur are presented in Manichean opposition. Waldo's is a quest for personal identity while Arthur's is for insight into the very nature of being. Waldo's ego imprisons the spiritual sense as materialism can do. His relationships breed frustration and a sense of inadequacy. Arthur with his open display of affection, his intuitive irrationalism is a constant repudiation of his failure. "Waldo is disappointed in love and in authorship and is increasingly resentful of his half-witted, incomprehensible brother" (Goodwin, 173).

Waldo's rationalist approach to life was a legacy his parents had left him. "Waldo had not been taught to pray, because, said Mother, everything depends on your will, it would be foolishness to expect anything else, we can achieve what we want if we are determined, if we are confident that we are strong"(77). As a substitute to the apotheosis of a transcendent entity, Waldo places himself on an imaginary pedestal and from his vantagepoint presumes to look down on all else. "If any, his religion had become a cultivation of personal detachment, of complete transparency – he was not prepared to think emptiness – of mind. In this way he suffered no immediate hurt"(177).

He had a taste for the intellectual life and had literary aspirations. His fragmentary attempt at writing a novel - *Tiresias a Youngish Man* - became the stigma of his anemic sterility. "I want to, and am going to write about *myself*"(94) he wants to tell Dulcie when she enquires about his writing. His writing achievements include several articles, a fragment of a novel, membership of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, and reading a paper on Barron Field to the Beecroft Literary Society. In old age he imagines that a fragment of Tennyson's "Fatima" that he has copied out, is the product of his own muse. "Waldo is the sterile artist without a source, without connection to the source of life. He is a representative of twentieth century intellectual man who has cut himself off from love and the mystery of the universe"(McCulloch, 50).

McCulloch points out how Waldo's relationship with his brother is paradoxical. Waldo's need, hatred, love and jealousy of Arthur distort and twist his perspective of the world. Superficially, he lives and acts out a life nourished by the belief that Arthur is an idiot, an inferior being. But the closeness he has with Arthur draws out from within him admissions: "Perhaps he dreaded Arthur most of all, because of something Arthur might tell him one day"(167) (McCulloch, 40). Even Waldo muses at the ineffable and yet inextricable interpenetration of their existence; "With Arthur it was different. There was no escaping Arthur. At best he became the sound of your own breathing, his silences sometimes consoled....Life as he began in time to see it, is the twin consciousness, jostling you, hindering you, but with which at unexpected moments, it is possible to communicate in ways both animal and delicate"(76). Arthur would remain an inescapable taunt to Waldo's very existence. "He has hated Arthur for everything he is: for his ability to love people, for his capacity for

experiencing, for his insight into the truth of things, for his appearance, and most of all for the fact of his existence" (McCulloch, 52).

Narcissism and insensitivity become a response to Waldo's failure to love. The fullest expression of his self to the world is consequently superficial and egocentric. His self-absorbed belief in his greatness leaves him in silent competition with Arthur. "Waldo didn't believe it was possible to have more than one genius around"(35). When Mrs. Brown doesn't allow Waldo to squeeze the butter and knead the dough because Arthur has according to her "a particular gift for it", Waldo is piqued, all the more so, when Arthur calls these homely occupations his "vocation".

> "Waldo was more jealous of that word than he was of Arthur's privilege. He wondered where he had got it from. Because words are not Arthur's line. It was Waldo who collected them, like stamps or coins. He made lists of them. He rolled them in his mouth like polished stones. Then Arthur went and sprang this vocation thing of his."(35-6)

This jealousy also manifests itself as a defense to keep a part of him inviolate. When Arthur asks him if he can act in Waldo's play, Waldo refuses. He realizes his creative life "was something he could not bear to share with his brother, whose breathing he used to listen to whenever he woke in the night, the brother who looked almost right inside him when they opened their eyes on twin pillows in the morning"(39). This resentment ossifies into hatred as the fear of being upstaged resurfaces when he finds Dulcie and Arthur together, finds Arthur reading *The Brothers Karamazov* in the library and reads Arthur's poem. It envelops him in hatred. "He hated his brother Arthur, although, or perhaps because, Arthur was the thread of continuity, and might even be the core of truth"(186-7).

"Waldo's is a polished, metallic surface, impermeable to others, whether in the community or the family"(Walsh, 93). He can't commune with his father, "Sitting in the train Waldo suddenly looked straight into his father's face....Waldo might have leant back to continue the escape he had made, if his clothes tightening hadn't constrained him, together with the fear that freedom might be the equivalent of isolation. So that in the end he would have liked to touch his father's goodness, but could only be touched by it"(79). Similarly, "Mrs. Poulter was one of the fifty-seven things and persons Waldo hated"(58). His passionate loathing becomes in White's prose a laughably precise and constrictive tabulation that lumps inanimate things and people in a way that imbues the comic with pathos. Even his curious relationship with Arthur as a child was half histrionic, half natural - "So they moved through the landscape of boyhood, two figures seen at a distance, or too close up... he learned to give them what they wanted. Occasionally, in passing, after returning the scones to the table, he would very carefully brush the crumbs which had fallen on Arthur's knees, with a candid though ostentatious charity which moved the observer – as well as the performer"(75-6). Even when he contemplates marriage to Dulcie just prior to anticlimactically finding her with Arthur, he figures most prominently in his considerations:

> Waldo went over the way in which he would benefit by marriage with Dulcie. On the financial side they might have to skimp a bit at first, because he would refuse to touch anything Dulcie brought with her until he proved himself as a husband. Nobody would be in a position to say theirs was not an idealistic marriage....Then the home. Undoubtedly he would benefit by having a home of his own. A bed to himself....But it was his work which would benefit most. The atmosphere in which to evolve a style. The novel of psychological relationships in a family, based on his own experience for truth, illuminated by what his imagination would infuse. One of the first things he intended to do was buy a filing cabinet to install in his study. (149-150)

His colleagues - Miss Glasson, Cornelius and Parslow - at the library too are repulsed - as he keeps up the pretense that marks the dichotomy of his split existence:

> Because Mr. Brown of the intellectual breathers in the Botanic Gardens must never be confused with the subfusc, almost abstract figure, living on top of a clogged greasetrap, and the moment of creative explosion, under the arches of yellow grass, down Terminus Road. Waldo Brown, in whom these two phenomena met on slightly uneasy terms...looking out from behind his barricade of words and perceptions... his less approachable self....
> So Waldo, who was in frequent demand, continued to refuse, on principle, by formula.
> To submit himself to the ephemeral, the superficial relationships might damage the crystal core holding itself in reserve for some imminent moment of higher idealism. Just as he had avoided fleshly love – while understanding its algebra, of course – the better to convey eventually its essence.(183)

Thelma Herring feels, "The novelist systematically undermines all Waldo's pretensions, and his final judgement on him, conveyed through the dog's symbolic mutilation of his corpse, could not be harsher: yet the reader who remembers the all-too-human embarrassment of the young Waldo, writhing under the physical protection of his imbecile brother, the diffident warnings of his unworldly father, the patronage of the wealthy Mrs. Musto, is likely to retain for him, even in his desiccated and self-cherishing old age, some grains of sympathy that may soften without fundamentally changing the verdict that White clearly invites us to make"(Herring,75).

3.2.2 Arthur

The intensity of Arthur's vision creates for him his own mystical drama, until he is lost in its many rich moments. He lives out a vivid individual life. White attempts to show the failure to combine two ways of seeing and hence of life into one complete whole through Arthur and his brother. Failure to reconcile and integrate their differences results in an intense love-hate relationship. Even though the twins are, as the blurb says, "two people living one life. ... They shared everything – except their view of things. Waldo, with his intelligence, saw everything and understood little. Arthur was the fool who didn't bother to look. He understood." Arthur is vignetted as a holy fool that is judged by all, save perhaps Dulcie and Mrs. Poulter, as a madman. Paradoxically, Arthur's outer seeming derangement bespoke of mystical intimation within.

Presented as a sort eccentric seer that sees into the heart of the matter, his inner life merges memory, creative memory and the present in a soft-edged shifting pattern in which the motif of the mandala stands out. His character is developed by sacramental images and sibylline language redolent of a luminous vision. Wordlessly, because he finds that language can be a menace alienating even those whose lives are interwined inextricably.

> 'Words are not what make you see.'
> 'I was taught they were,' Waldo answered in hot words.
> 'I dunno,' Arthur said, 'I forget what I was taught. I only remember what I've learnt.'(56)

> He smiled, though for all those pairs of twins with no word between them to express the truth. (280)

But language and its reified form of art do have meaning and immense potential in his schema. During his encounter with a piqued Waldo who feels threatened to see his 'dill' brother at the library encroaching on what he has come to deem his domain

of words, language and literature, Waldo asks in jealous exasperation of Arthur who has been explaining his difficulties with *The Brothers Karamazov*:

> What will it do for you? To understand? The Grand Inquisitor?....
> 'I could help people,' Arthur said, beginning to devour the words.(199)

Knowledge is not a source of self-congratulation or for superior perception for Arthur, but a means of altruism and selflessness, of responsibility. This perception also defines what Arthur considers the purpose of writing and its subjects. When he tells Waldo he should write about Len Saporta the reason he gives is that, "simple people are somehow more...transparent...you can see right into them. Then you can write about them....it doesn't matter what you write about, provided you tell the truth about it"(29). According to Rodney Edgecombe, Arthur's is not an esoteric closed notion of literature like his brother's, but a more mimetic view, utilitarian and socially relevant as opposed to self-justifying culture or egoistically self-expressive aesthetics (Edgecombe, 75).

He seems to be positing a transparent nature in opposition to a nature that contrives to be opaque with screens of privacy and pride. After Waldo's gruesome death, Arthur returns to the Library in the course of his confused ramblings and realizes that life has taught him more than literature can.

> he squared his shoulders, he put on the cloak of an air, and swirled inside the Public Library, squelching over the polished rubber, trailing his identity round the room in which he had begun the struggle to find it. If he no longer felt moved to take down a book, it was because in the end knowledge had come to him, not through words, but lightning. (307)

White in *Flaws in the Glass*, admits he has come to believe that truth may be "the property of silence – at any rate the silences filling the space between words", over which he only "sometimes" has control (1981: 42).

Through understanding and identifying with others he shows a capacity to love which is not mawkish as the hieratic elements in his character are emphasized. The spontaneous and unaffected profound inner tranquility of the supposed 'imbecile' rejoices in the palpable actuality of common life and communicates the intimations of other realities which lie locked within quotidian experience. William Walsh notes that the societal response to Arthur's simplemindedness, varies between the horror of worried parents when Arthur is young – 'I warn yer, Mr. Brown," Mr. Haynes was saying, and his usually jolly chins were compressed, "you'll have to restrain him. Yer don't realise a big lump of a boy like that can turn violent. In his condition. It's hard, I know, for the parents to see.'(47) – to the exaggerated bonhomie of the men hiding their embarrassment at the Speedex Service Station when Arthur is old – 'Hi, mate! Hi, Arthur! How's the Brown Bomb?'(59)(Walsh, 88-89). Arthur has as his creed the trust of everyday tangibles:

> Arthur eventually added Mr. Allwright to what he knew as truest: to grain in wood, to bread broken roughly open, to cow-pats, neatly freshly dropped. If he did not add Mrs. Allwright it was because she did not fit into that same world of objects, she never became distinct, she was all ideas, plots and tempers. In myth of life, he never ever took to Hera. (227)

His is the arena of simple, down-to-earth practical abilities – milking the cow, making bread, and enjoying his work as a delivery boy with the Allwrights. He is good with animals, has a prodigious gift for sums, an openness and unaffected candor which enamour him to Dulcie Feinstein, Mrs. Poulter and his mother. He empathizes and emotes with others genuinely. William Walsh comments, "Arthur passes almost effortlessly into the lives and feelings of others, but he is entranced by the images of

these as he is infatuated with the glints and clouds and lights in his glass marbles"(Walsh, 92-3).

Ken Goodwin feels that Waldo's "sterile, jaundiced view of life is balanced by Arthur's. Confused and inarticulate, he nevertheless has a radiant goodness and insight that are represented by his four mandala-like marbles. He realizes that most of those around him cannot appreciate them or their meaning, that ' It was himself who was and would remain, the keeper of the mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light.' The struggle to guess their meaning is symbolized by the 'red gold disc of the sun', which he strives to hold, but also by the icebergs, that 'moaned and jostled one another, crunching and tinkling... to splinter into glass balls which he gathered in his protected hands'" (Goodwin, 173). Arthur's solid mandala is a symbol or image for his insight and need for an encompassing totality. Walsh remarks, "Arthur contemplates his marble almost in a religious sense, seeing in it mysteries, realities, symbols and significances – an endless range of reality enclosed in a miniature universe"(Walsh, 92).

After seeing a performance of *Gotterdammerung*, he wonders "Who and where are the gods? He could not have told, but knew, in his flooded depths"(217). The question of god is one of the thematic preoccupations of the book worked out extensively through the persona of Arthur at several narrative junctures. Thelma Herring notes, "Brought up by parents who are conscientious unbelievers, Arthur is untroubled by religious questions until in old age he becomes perplexed by the problem of pain and the Christian emphasis on "the blood and the nails", and begins the search for his identity, which he finds, however, "not through words, but by lightning". To Dulcie Feinstein, with whom he experiences spiritual union, he is the instrument through whom her dying father is reunited to God; and to Mrs. Poulter...he becomes the object of faith when her God is brought crashing down by the shock of the discovery of Waldo's defiled body"(Herring, 78). Mrs. Poulter is restating the message of the text's epigraphs and perhaps of Arthur's very persona when she declares, "This man would be my saint...if we could still believe in saints. Nowadays...we've only men to believe in. I believe in this man"(214). McCulloch concurs, "Arthur the Divine fool, the holy idiot, is developed to bring forth, by means of contrast with Waldo, the concept of the sterility of the intellect when it is divorced from the spirit and from love" (McCulloch, 39).

His faith and love however cannot redeem his alter ego. He realizes, "Waldo had always hated people, but always rather, well, as a joke. Waldo had done his block at Arthur, but always more or less as a brother. Till it was made plain as a bedstead that the life, the sleep they had shared, must have been jingling brassily all those years with the hatred which only finally killed"(305). Waldo's death is a revelation about their relationship, but it also cuts Arthur loose. "All his family gone, he was threatened with permanent manhood"(306).

McCulloch argues, "It is important to realize that neither Arthur or Waldo can exist as a whole individual without the other. Consequently there is a logical reason for Arthur ending up in a "nut house" at Waldo's death.... Waldo should not be viewed merely as a character who exists as a contrast to the true seeker, Arthur. It is through the form and structure of "Waldo's section" that we can understand "Arthur's section". Although structured separately the two parts interact, and the interdependence of the two sections reflects the necessary interdependence of the two brothers" (McCulloch, 50).

3.3 CIRCLES OF EXISTENCE

The other denizens in the world of *The Solid Mandala* constitute the web of interactions that frame the lives and thoughts of the Brown brothers. They are

sparingly etched and our perception of them is deeply colored by the personas that filter through the consciousness of the two brothers. White, in this novel, employs a combination of indirect and direct modes of characterization. In the indirect mode of characterization, the traits and thoughts of a character are revealed through an omniscient narrator who seems to have complete access to the thoughts and actions of the character or through what other characters in the novel think or say about the character concerned. In the direct mode of characterization, the reader is allowed to draw his own conclusions from the concerned character's actions and words. Thus the characters are constructed, as much by their actions or words as how those actions are perceived by the slightly veiled omniscient narrator. For the sake of analysis, I have divided some of the remaining characters in the text into two categories – the inner circle of Mrs. Poulter, Mrs. and Mr. Brown who have the most direct contact with the twins; the outer circle of other people who appear in the novel and frame some of its perspectives.

3.3.1 The Inner Circle

Mrs. Poulter is revealed as an ordinary suburban housewife in the first section, 'In the Bus'. Portrayed with a degree of condescension reflected off the perceptions of the supercilious Waldo and patronizing Mrs. Brown in the second section, the final two sections filtered through the consciousness of Arthur and the narrator add dimensions of unsuspected mysticism to her portrayal.

She is initially established as a sympathetic character when she defends the twin brothers from Mrs. Dun's disapproval of their holding hands and Mr. Poulter's denigrating references to them. "Attempts on herself seldom hurt Mrs. Poulter; it was the attacks on other people. The Mister Browns, for instance. Unable to decide how they might be protected she would take them a baked custard. And return the better for it"(18). Though no intellectual, her unaffected simplicity and openness allows her to comfortably talk to and enlighten Arthur. Filtered through the disdainful perspective of Waldo, this translates differently – "Arthur...loved to talk to Mrs. Poulter. He loved to ask her questions, and Mrs. Poulter, curiously enough, although an inalterably stupid creature, usually seemed to find an answer"(61). Thelma Herring comments on the function of such focalization within the text. "That Mrs. Poulter, through her simple humanity that enables her to find answers to Arthur's questions and respond to his goodness with affection, can earn a mandala and burn with Arthur "in a fit of understanding or charity"(p. 310) seems to imply that a measure of illumination is attainable by most people"(Herring, 81).

Her portrayal oscillates between the mundane and the quasi-mystic. She is the lonely, sixty-seven year old housewife "who still liked a bit of colour" and takes great pleasure in her new "watermelon cardigan" (296). When she remembers that she had not seen the Brown brothers, curiosity and subterfuge coalesce in her special brand of good naturedness. "It was a Saturday afternoon, when Mrs. Poulter, trying to mind her own business, failing to outstare the hedge opposite, decided to bake a nice custard. After all, someone could be sick, and the neighbourliness was another thing to curiosity"(301). Thus, it is that she discovers the sordid and mutilated corpse of Waldo which shakes her faith and sense of secure distance.

Until then she had clung to "faith, which her husband Bill didn't altogether approve of, but it was what she was brought up to, if she didn't always understand, but hoped to in time, not through the ministers, she would never of dared ask, but somehow. She had her Lord Jesus"(298). However, after she sees the desecrated Waldo, Armageddon is unleashed and her iconization of Christ is shown to be insubstantial, "And He released His Hand from the nails. And fell down, in a thwack of canvas, a cloud of dust"(303). Arthur becomes the testament of a more vital faith. "Since her Lord and master Jesus had destroyed himself that same day, she had been given this man-child as a token of everlasting life"(312). Her discovery that "we've only men to believe in", echoes the sentiment of the epigraphs to the novel. The novel closes with

her laying out tea for her husband just as it opened with her conversing with her neighbor. However, White reveals that her quotidian reality has changed permanently – "Then she turned, to do the expected things, before re-entering, her actual sphere of life"(316). Geoffrey Dutton comments "the mandala of wholeness is given to ... Mrs. Poulter at the very end of the book, who performs the ordinary expected things, and then re-enters that inner life which the exterior world cannot destroy"(in Edgecombe, 87).

The parents of the twins are largely narratively mediated by the gossipy exchange between Mrs. Poulter and Mrs. Dun in the first section, and then by their sons' points of view in the central sections. We learn their social value for the gossiping women comes from their being bonafide English in origin - having "come out from Home...when the boys were only bits of kids"(15), - and the material wellbeing indicated by their house having a veranda. The hint of class superiority connoted at by Mr. Brown being a white-collar worker who works at a bank and reads books in his spare time is neutralized for them by Mrs. Poulter's, "Mr. Brown senior was a gentleman...[b]ut not any better than us"(15). It's an introduction that tells us as much about the speakers as the spoken.

A shy bookish bank clerk and renegade Baptist, Mr. Brown, is described as a man of principle and kindness by his wife on his demise He had a taste for, but not the circumstances for an intellectual life. He insists on having a Greek pediment in the classical style on his roof and attempts to learn Norwegian to read Ibsen in the original. The image Waldo paints of him is of a conscientious bank clerk dulled by entrapment in a life of mechanical alienation.

> It was, he thought, the occasion of their last visit to the bank as children, that Waldo noticed his father looking out from the cage in which he stood.... Their father's eyes were brown, which Arthur had inherited. Their father's stare was at that moment directed outward, and not....Suddenly his shoulders hunched, to resist it seemed, compression by the narrow cage, his eyes were more deeply concentrated on some invisible point. More distinctly even than the morning he found their father dead Waldo would remember the morning of their last visit to the bank. (54)

The effete and pallid character of Mr. Brown is drawn with a measure of delicate compassion. Enervated he lives a life of silent disappointment and mild self-deli ion.

> After he retired, Dad would sometimes recall...his escape by way of Intellectual Enlightenment, and the voyage to Australia, ... but in the telling, he would grow darker rather than enlightened, his breathing thicker, clogged with the recurring suspicion that he might be chained still. (145)

Anne Brown, is the product of a colonial upper-class milieu. Mrs. Poulter in describing the Browns says, "Mr. Brown was a good man. Now *Mrs.* Brown...she was always doing a favour. Even to her husband. She was good too mind you, but she never stopped letting you see she had thrown herself away"(16). Proud of her Quantrell heritage she proves an indelible and mildly baleful influence. Having "Married Beneath Her"(35) she manages to cling to vestiges of bygone days and mores even as she copes with the realities of working class life in Australia. There is in her the aloofness of gentility bruised, a screen for the humiliation of her simpleton son, decline in status and polite poverty. Self-deception is another psychological defense she employs. Waldo recounts, "Mother never grew disappointed to the same extent, because if she wanted to, she could dare the truth to be the truth. For a long time after everyone else realized, she persuaded herself Arthur was some kind of genius waiting to disclose himself. But Dad was not deceived" (35). Even when her husband dies and she has to deign to use Mrs. Poulter's phone to call the doctor, divested of spontaneity there is sense of put on theatre in her reaction, an emotional legacy she leaves Waldo:

> Waldo followed her because she was technically their mother. Whereas their mother crossed Terminus Road because she was their father's widow.
>
> ....
>
> 'It's my husband, Mrs. Poulter. I should like to ring for the doctor. If you will allow me. Though we must realise nothing can be done.'
> Her pure, inherited voice erected a barrier not only between herself and Mrs. Poulter, but those she had conceived in an adulterated tradition. Though Waldo could imitate voices, even adapt himself to situations, if they didn't threaten to extinguish his individuality.... After briefly rehearsing the part, he was running springily in, ignoring Bill Poulter in his own house. (72)

As she aged, sinking into querulous and at times imperious inebriation, the pinched gentility barely softened. Decrepit, in a tipsy moment, she asks Arthur if he feels she has failed him, only to turn back from the moment of revelation.'No!' she said, quickly in her own defense. 'Don't tell me! Nobody normal ever enjoyed settling their accounts...Nobody likes to be told. That they have got a spot. On their nose. On the night of the ball'(271).

Assessing them William Walsh concludes,"Nourished by the most anaemic of abstractions of high-minded rationalism and genteel socialism the Brown parents live a dumbly desperate life, balancing in the air – just – their hopeless aspirations, their painful memories, their present disappointments, their insoluble problems with the twins. ... Each in his limited way is a good person, each is a failure, each inadequate for the strains put on them"(Walsh, 91).

3.3.2 The Outer Circle

The outer circle of characters in *The Solid Mandala* holds an assortment of people. Most of them are marked as inhabitants of 'the Great Australian Emptiness'. Mrs. Dun's is a mundane existence untouched by the need to seek meaning and vitiated by concerns of society and the flesh. The narrator comments on her relationship with Mrs. Poulter: "The private life of other parties act as the cement of friendship. The Brother's Brown could be about to set the friendship of the friends" (14-15). In the text, she is early established as an unsympathetic character when she disapproves of the Brown brothers holding hands and predicts something horrible will happen. Curiously throughout the opening section, she dwells on the possibility that "they could come and murder you in broad daylight"(14) or that a hedge like the Browns have might be a hindrance "when someone's got you by the throat"(15) almost prefiguring the gory denouement of the narrative.

The pragmatic quotidian existence of Mr. Poulter too eschews the need for seeking deeper meaning in life. He is portrayed as a representative of the phlegmatic dailiness of life. Going by his wife's account, apparently the war changed and hardened him. He describes the brothers as "A couple of no-hopers with ideas about 'emselves"(18). He functions as a foil and context for the delineation of Mrs. Poulter. Just as the Feinsteins, who with their Jewish cultivation and intelligence, allow White to generate superb social comedy from the encounter between the callow twins and the sophisticated but gentle family. Others like Waldo's colleagues at the Municipal Library, the Allwrights who kept the shop Arthur worked in, and the rich eccentric Mrs. Musto form the backdrop of humanity against which Waldo and Arthur are delineated and live out their destinies.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been shown that White's characters function within a narrative paradigm that seeks to rise above realism. As a result, at times they seem flat and

forced by certain modes of critical assessment. This however, can and has been defended by using alternative frames of reference. The narrative agenda to reach at the core of human reality and White's mythopoeic conceptualization of the nature of that core, frame and determine the light in which he depicts his characters, as does the perspective through which they are focalized.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. What is your assessment of Patrick White's characterization with reference to *The Solid Mandala*?

2. Compare and contrast the characterization of Waldo and Arthur Brown. How does White use his characters as vehicles for the novel's themes?

3.6 GLOSSARY

Armageddon: A Biblical reference to the scene of the last deciding battle between good and evil

***Brothers Karamozov*:** The final novel of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, it presents a search for faith, for God as it central idea. The famous 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' embodies and dramatizes Ivan's repudiation of God. In *The Solid Mandala* the novel becomes a signifier of Arthur's ability to appreciate literature of this calibre and the questions it raises

Dill: Slang for mentally retarded

***Gotterdammerung*:** A music drama by Wagner, which concludes with the end of the gods being marked by the crashing of the beams and rafters at Walhalla. The drama is used in the novel to bring to the fore Arthur's first inklings of interest in spiritual questions.

Greek pediment: An ornamental triangular roof structure over a doorway; in the text it is symbolic of Mr. Brown's slightly misplaced taste for what is classical and intellectually superior.

Manichean opposition: binary opposition between two quantities seen as being in complete contrast to one another

Mythopoeic: Relating to the creation of myths or a mythic framework for a literary work

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UNIT 4 MESSAGES IN MOTIFS

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 Androgyny Motif
4.2 Mandala Motif
4.3 Let Us Sum Up
4.4 Questions
4.5 Glossary
4.6 References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will discuss in detail two motifs that are central to the narrative. It will examine the occurrence in the text of the androgyny and mandala motifs and some implications they have for the interpretation of the novel.

4.1 ADROGYNY MOTIF

The allusions to Tiresias and the hermaphrodite Adam are the strongest manifestations of the androgynous figure in the text. A weaker version of this motif is seen in textual representations of transvestitism. "The union of opposites, a distinctive feature of many of White's novels, here takes the image of androgyny, the attraction-repulsion relationship of the twins for each other"(Goodwin, 173). Androgynous figures in the novel can be read as symbols of wholeness and inextricable connection.

When Mr. Brown asks the young Arthur if there is "any character, any incident, that appeals" to him from his reading of Greek Myths, Arthur answers 'Tiresias' but knows he can not explain the full intensity of his feelings.

> They would laugh to be told how shocked he was for Tiresias when Zeus took away his sight at the age of seven – *seven* –for telling people things they shouldn't know. So Arthur kept quiet. He was only surprised they didn't notice how obviously his heart was beating when Zeus rewarded Tiresias with the gift of prophesy and a life seven times as long as the lives of ordinary men. Then there was that other bit, about being changed into a woman, if only for a short time. Time enough, though to know it wasn't all that different. (224)

To Arthur, then, Tiresias is a motif of the visionary who 'sees' and is confusingly punished for it. There is a measure of personal identification implied in the palpitation he experiences. Tiresias points to the fate of the visionary for the young Arthur. At another level, the Greek figure, who had been both a male and a female in his lifetime, plays on the unifying potential of androgyny, one that is elaborated in Arthur's apprehension of the significance of the hermaphrodite Adam.

A.M. McCulloch points out that Waldo borrows Arthur's love for Tiresias for the title of his work, 'Tiresias: A Youngish Man'. However according to him, it is the more sordid aspects of Tiresias that Waldo finds a personal analogy with. "Tiresias is the character in Greek mythology who, having looked upon the lovemaking of the gods, becomes wise but blind. Waldo is given a window view of Mrs. Poulter at her

ablutions and about to be seized by her husband". Furthermore, McCulloch opines, it is not the androgynous potential for understanding or totality that rubs off on Waldo, but the figure's sterility. "Waldo, in projecting his identity into the Tiresias figure, does so with a rigidity that curtails any possible passionate expressions of life. His "creative" concerns are arid areas of grammar" observes McCulloch.

> On one occasion he wrote: In the extreme of his youth, which was fast approaching, Tiresias suffered difficulties with his syntax and vocabulary, he found that words, turning to stones would sink below the surface, out of sight"
> He did not care for that, but kept it. He kept everything now, out of spite for Goethe, or out of respect for posterity. (211)

McCulloch goes onto say that in contrast to this, Waldo recognized that Arthur's poem contained "warmed stones of words"(213) and that Arthur was capable of touching the essence of tragedy that his unresolved syntax could not reach. However, this is a realization that Waldo could not admit openly; instead he calls Arthur's poem a "disgusting *blood* myth"(213). Waldo attempts to accept the rationalist viewpoint towards mythology expressed by his father when reading the Greek myths to his children: "None of this is real, none of this is true"(223). He denigrates the liberating potential of myth even further by convincing himself that he'd known, right from the beginning, that "All this reading from Greek myths was really for Arthur"(33)(McCulloch, 38-9). In the end, after the near cataclysmic realization that was brought on by Waldo's discovery of Arthur's poem, Waldo becomes the cursed and doomed Tiresias of his plagued imagination as he prepares to burn his writing – "About four o'clock he went down, Tiresias, a thinnish man, the dress-box under his arm, to the pit where they had been accustomed to burn only those things from which they could bear to be parted".

Thus the same motif has almost dichotomous implications for the two brothers whose lives are marked by two ways of seeing the same thing. At this level the Tiresias motif becomes yet another structural element used to reinforce the paradoxically linked dichotomy of sensibility manifested by the two brothers. The other variation of this motif, the hermaphrodite Adam, emphasizes the interpenetrating destinies of the two, as opposed to their incomplete and almost impossible union.

Once while in the library as Arthur 'wrestled with the Books', he came upon the other motif that was to portend wholeness for him. The passage has been identified by Thelma Herring to have been taken out of Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* (Herring, 80).

> On one occasion, in some book, he came across a message. Pinned to the back of his mind, it rattled and twitched, painfully, hopefully, if obscure:
>
> *As the shadow continually follows the body of one who walks in the sun, so our hermaphrodite Adam, though he appears in the form of a male, nevertheless carries about with him Eve, or his wife, hidden in his body.*
>
> ...And if one wife, why not two? Or three? He could not have chosen between them. He could not have chosen between them. He could not sacrifice his first, his fruitful darling, whose mourning even streamed with a white light. Nor the burnt flower-pots, the russet apples of his second. Or did the message in the book refer, rather, to his, third veiled bride? (281)

According to Carolyn Bliss, "The implication is that Arthur, like the hermaphrodite, could embrace within his single life and being these conflicting opposites, that he could bring quaternity and sexual duality into controlled but dynamic juxtaposition which the mandala symbolizes. Arthur nearly does this, if only briefly, in the mandala dance he performs for Mrs. Poulter. In this ritual celebration of his fullness,

he dances the essence of the four beings who shape his life." (Bliss, 109) The first wife is identified with Dulcie, the second Mrs. Poulter and his veiled bride is revealed to be Waldo when the motif is repeated as Arthur leaves the library, " his shadow following him in the sun, as he carried away inside him – his brother."(285)

That both Tiresias and the hermaphrodite Adam are linked motifs with shifting emphasis is indicated when Arthur answers Waldo's accusation that he thinks nothing and has no worries in his head thus:

> 'If you want to know, I was thinking about Tiresias,'Arthur said to interest him. 'How he was changed into a woman for a short time. That sort of thing would be different, wouldn't it from the hermaphroditic Adam who carries his wife about inside him.'(282-283)

Transvestitism is yet another manifestation of the androgynous motif. It does not however, signify a genuine wholeness but a kind of put on identity, a shadow of reality. When Waldo puts on his mother's old dress, it is an attempt to connect with a "sense of moral proportion" and of a heritage he feels he can take pride in. He is imaginatively transformed into a personification of Memory: "although memory is the glacier in which the past is preserved, memory is also licensed to improve on life"(191-3). This trope can also be an oblique pointer to the position that identity itself is a construct. This may be significant in the light of *The Twyborn Affair* which has been described as "the fictional swan-song in which White mythicized his homosexuality" (Craven, 50) and employs the motif of transvestitism to denote more explicitly themes of sexual ambiguity and narcissism.

4.2 THE MANDALA MOTIF

"In its simplest form a mandala is a circle enclosing a square. While the outer circle constrains, the inner square seems to strive to escape. A solid mandala is three-dimensional; in its simplest form it is a sphere enclosing a cube. The cube, however, may add striations of color or become a randomized shape, such as one finds in glass marbles and paperweights."(Jones, 66)

The mandala, the eponymous motif of the novel recurs throughout the narrative as a symbol of totality and wholeness, especially in a spiritual sense. The way it is used in the novel, places added emphasis on the accessibility of this completeness and its presence in the simplest and most mundane aspects of life. This is quite a displacement from its conceptualization as an esoteric and exotic Oriental religious motif. The mandala is first mentioned in the text in a typically abrasive exchange that brings out some of the tensions between the two brothers at the centre of the narrative.

> 'Oh,' cried Waldo Brown in anguish, but I have not expressed half of what it is in me to express!'
> 'Don't worry,' he blubbered. 'There's time, Waldo, isn't there? ... You can write about Mr. Saporta and the carpets, and all the fennel down the side roads.'
> Just then that Mr. Dun straightened amongst the stakes up which he had been coaxing up his peas. He looked away quickly though, from what he saw. Waldo Brown saw a small mean face recognizing.
> .... 'One of the carpets had,' Arthur whimpered, 'right in the centre, what I would say was a mandala.'
> Waldo could not walk too fast. He had hoped originally for intellectual companions with whom to exchange the Everyman classics and play Schubert after tea.
> 'Come on!' he mumbled
> He hated his brother. (30)

The sterile and subjectless Waldo excludes Arthur from intellectual equality with him and Arthur's suggestions are only met with bitterness and the discontent. Waldo feels he is being made a spectacle of in public and as a result responds to Arthur not with quietude but taunting asperity. In many senses this passage is a capsule of the text's tensions. The tension between the intellectually inaccessible or aloof and the inspiration immanent in quotidian realities as well as mundane personalities. The motif attempts to hold both these in one entity, resolving the tension into a wholeness.

The motif appears or is chronologically prefigured in the narrative in the child Arthur's fascination during their cruise from England with "the red gold disc of the sun". Arthur ran to the rails only to be pulled back and told he might fall into the sea and "be lost forever" by his mother.

> He looked at her and said: "Yes. I might. For ever."
> Feeling the cold circles eddying out and away from him. (215)

The words describing the waves evoke a vignette of receding mandalas, as if symbolic of the possibility for totality reflected in everything. Again they reappear in his desire to see the icebergs which appear only in his dreams:

> Only in sleep the icebergs moaned, and jostled one another, crunching and tinkling. The moons of sky-blue ice fell crashing silently down to splinter into glass balls which he gathered in his protected hands.
> Somehow at least he knew from the beginning he was protected.(218)

When he is a schoolboy, Arthur finds solace in the marbles which become central mandalic motifs in the novel. Once again, the ordinariness of this motif is underscored in being linked to the marbles and to Arthur to whom it would easily be assumed the finer things in life were inaccessible.

> He was different then, in several ways. But did not mind since he had his marbles.
> However many marbles Arthur had – there were always those which got lost, and some he traded for other things – he considered four his permanencies. There were the speckled gold and the cloudy blue. There was the whorl of green and crimson circlets. There was the taw with a knot at the centre, which made him consider palming it off, until, on looking long and close, he discovered the knot was the whole point.
> Of all these jewels or touchstones, talismans or sweethearts, Arthur Brown got to love the knotted one best, and for staring at it, and rubbing at it, should have seen his face inside. After he had given two, in appreciation recognition, the flawed or knotted marble became more than ever his preoccupation. But he was ready to give it, too, if he were asked. Because this rather confusing oddity was really not his own. He seemed more the coil of green and crimson circlets. (228)

The emphasis on permanence is significant. As also the knot in the marble meant for Waldo that indicates the knot of opaqueness in his nature which makes him inaccessible to others, while Arthur manifests a nature of complete openness. At times the iterative symbolism seems intrusive. Dulcie and Mrs. Poulter are given one marble each, the flawed or knotted one is intended for Waldo, rejected by him and finally lost in a dark alley after Waldo's gruesome end, the one with whorls in it is kept by Arthur. According to Ashcroft, "Arthur sees that the "flaw", the "knot" at the centre of his marble, is the "whole point". The mandala shows that man is "surrounded" by perfection in the sense that it remains the ultimate horizon of his existence, and while wholeness is unenclosable by consciousness, man "obtains" infinity when he becomes aware of its intimation in ordinary experience"(Ashcroft,

126). Waldo's mandala lost in a back alley the night of his death thus, becomes an image of unrealized hope.

There are also variations on the mandala motif that interpretations have thrown up. For example, William Walsh posits, "Waldo sees himself as a crystal core to be held in reserve. Arthur's favourite glass marble, susceptible to light and touch, the image of the depths and contradictions of human nature, as it exists in the community, in the family, in a pair of friends, or lovers, or brothers, or in the single individual and stricken soul that Waldo and Arthur together compose" (Walsh, 96). Similarly, Ken Goodwin comments, "His sterile, jaundiced view of life is balanced by Arthur's. Confused and inarticulate, he nevertheless has a radiant goodness and insight that are represented by his four mandala-like marbles. He realizes that most of those around him cannot appreciate them or their meaning, that ' It was himself who was and would remain, the keeper of the mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light.' The struggle to guess their meaning is symbolized by the 'red gold disc of the sun', which he strives to hold, but also by the icebergs, that 'moaned and jostled one another, crunching and tinkling... to splinter into glass balls which he gathered in his protected hands'" (Goodwin, 173). The realization that the nature of the mandala he held made them open to misinterpretation as 'simply marbles' and him as just 'simple' was not lost on Arthur who strove to protect the mandalas and their observers from the crassness of such observations. He realizes he cannot force his vision upon others, least of all his own brother. The mystery and magic of the mandalic marbles were safeguarded by him, preserved for people and relationships that would honor their value and be touched by their totality.

> Sometimes ... he took out those marbles left over from the school yard. Not to play with. It had developed into something more serious than play. For the circle of the distant mountains would close around him, the golden disc spinning closer in the sky, as he contemplated the smaller sphere lying on the palm of his hand.
> He would put it away quickly, though, on hearing anyone approach from behind. He was less afraid of theft, or even total destruction, than he was of damage by scorn. (233)

To Arthur the marbles become symbols of momentary centrality and meaning that keep gaining significance with time. "Arthur contemplates his marble almost in a religious sense, seeing in it mysteries, realities, symbols and significances – an endless range of reality enclosed in a miniature universe."(Walsh, 92) This is reinforced by the text's allusions to Jung's concept of mandalic totality. Arthur stumbles upon this textual validation of what he had always known when he is visiting Mrs. Musto's house. Arthur read from the encyclopedia of Mrs. Musto's husband Ralph:

> '*The Mandala is a symbol of totality. It is believed to be the "dwelling of the god". Its protective circle is a pattern of order super - imposed on – psychic – chaos. Sometimes its geometric form is seen as a vision (either waking or in a dream) or –*'
> His voice had fallen to the most elaborate hush.
> '*Or danced,*' Arthur read. (238)

This brings out the validity of this personal vision to mankind at large and prepares us for the dance which has like Jung's mandala four corners to himself. He asks his father what the meaning of totality is, and Mr. Brown can only fumble with a dictionary meaning which made Arthur realize "Dad would never know, any more than Waldo. It was himself who was, and would remain, the keeper of mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light"(240). The motif is brought to a sort of climax in Arthur's mandalic dance.

So Arthur Brown danced, beginning at the first corner, from which he would proceed through stages to the fourth, and beyond....
In the first corner, as a prelude to all that he had to reveal, he danced the dance of himself. Half clumsily, half electric. He danced the gods dying on a field of crimson velvet, against the discords of human voices. Even in the absence of gods, his life, or dance, was always prayerful. Even though he hadn't been taught, like the grocer, to go down on his knees and stick his hands together. Instead, offering his prayer to what he knew from light or silences. He danced the sleep of sleep, their secrets locked prudently up, safe, until their spoken thoughts or farts, gave them away. He danced the moon, anaesthetized by bottled cestrum. He danced the disc of the orange sun above icebergs, which was in a sense his beginning, and should perhaps be his end....
In the second corner he declared his love for Dulcie Feinstein, and for her husband, by whom, through their love for Dulcie, he was, equally possessed, so they were all three united, and their children still to be conceived. Into their corner of his mandala he wove their Star, on which their three cornered relationship was partly based. Flurries of hydrangea - headed music provided a ceremony of white notes falling exactly into place, and not far behind, the twisted ropes of dark music Waldo had forced on Dulcie the afternoon of strangling. There she was the bones of her, seated on the upright chair, in black. And restored to flesh by her lover's flesh. The inextinguishable, always more revealing eyes....
... In Mrs. Poulter's corner he danced the rite of ripening pears, and little rootling suckling pigs. Skeins of golden honey were swinging and glittering from his drunken mouth. Until he reached the stillest moment. He was the child she had never carried in the dark of her body, under her heart, from the beat of which, he was already learning what he could expect. The walls of his circular fortress shuddered...
He had begun to stamp, but bitterly rigid, in his withering. In the fourth corner, which was his brother's, the reeds sawed at one another. There was a shuffling of dry mud, a clattering of dead flags, or papers. Of words and ideas skewered to paper. The old, bent, over-used aluminum skewers. Thus pinned and persecuted, what should have risen in pure flight, dropped to a dry twitter, a clipped twitching. He couldn't dance his brother out of him, not fully. They were too close for it to work, closest and farthest when, with both his arms, he held them together, his fingers running with candle-wax. He could not save. At most a little comfort gushed out guiltily, from out of their double image, their never quite united figure. In that corner of the dance his anguished feet had trampled the grass into a desert.
... Till in the centre of their mandala he danced, the passion of all their lives, the blood running out the backs of his hands, water out of the hole in his ribs. His mouth was a silent hole, because no sound was needed to explain. (265-6)

The varied symbolism of the mandala dance - the Chinese woman under the wheel tree, the evocation of the dying gods, the moon, the orange sun, the Star, the pears and pigs and goldenhoney, the blood of the Passion points to the truth not of any one creed but of a perennial philosophy "offering his prayer to what he knew from light and silences"(265) - are narrative resonances that make divinity seem immanent in Arthur's very being.

According to Edgecombe, the dance begins with a Walt Whitmanesque paean to an inclusive encompassing self that brings together the formative influences in his life and conceptualization of religion. "His religion is one that transcends all religions" (Edgecombe, 84). The dying gods of *Gotterdammerung* are reduced to a theatrical rite, the dogmatic and formulaic creed of Mr. Allwright, the sterile and forced agnosticism of his rationalistic family and the solar and lunar portents symbolic of the mandalic wholeness. The "androgynous trinitarian unity" which includes Dulcie, her

husband and Arthur are connected by love to the former's children yet to be conceived. Thus the second corner presents the "representatives of the continuity of life" (Edgecombe, 85). The Star of David, two triangles inverted upon each other becomes a mandalic symbol choreographing religion and unity into the dance. Mrs. Poulter's corner "is a Keatsian hymn to ripeness" (Edgecombe, 85), it enacts and through childlike simplicity rectifies the childlessness of its medial figure. It also recalls the sterility of Waldo's plastic doll that engendered only negative emotions of vulnerability in Mrs. Poulter. Waldo can't be integrated as easily. "The tragedy of Waldo's life, its meaninglessness and vacancy, is contained in the imagery of skewered words and of language crumpling up in sterile self-enclosure" (Edgecombe, 86). Arthur experiences a sense of failure and responsibility. Finally, there is "the coda in which the sacrifice of Christ is reenacted, fixing and steadying the four corners of the dance by its centrality, and exorcising the misery woven into the pattern, not by evading it but by transfiguring it" (Edgecombe, 86).

Edgecombe connects this to the poem of Arthur's that precipitates the novel's denouement. "It is finally this search for a transcendent, passional significance in suffering that Arthur tries to convey through his poem" (Edgecombe, 86). The dance encompasses in its choreography his insights, knowledge and experience, the poem encapsulates his vision of the place of pain in human reality.

> my heart is bleeding for the Viviseckshunist
> Cordelia is bleeding for her father's life
> all Marys in the end bleed
> but do not complane because they know
> they cannot have it any other way(212)

Thelma Herring comments, "The main device for linking characters is, however, the central symbol of the novel, Arthur's four marbles or "solid mandalas" which signify the integrity of the self. (The Sanskrit word "mandala", denoting the ritual or magic circle used in Lamaism and in Tantric yoga as an aid to contemplation, is used to signify the self or totality.) ... But the mandala symbolism extends much further. Jung points out ... that lamaistic mandalas are based on a quaternary system (hence the number of Arthur's marbles and the four corners of his mandala dance) and that the figure of the square often gives the idea of the house or temple – which surely explains the insistence on the shape of the Brown's house with its Greek pediment. ...In fact, by imagery and allusion White constructs a network of mandala symbols"(Herring, 79). The wheel, the lotus, the rose (it is perhaps significant that Arthur refers to a wreath of roses framing Waldo when he puts on his mother's dress, since this cryptically described incident seems to suggest a vain search for totality through family heritage), the Star of David which Len Saporta gives to Dulcie, the central design in Saporta's carpet, the rock crystal, the sun, the orange colored jujubes which the orange-haired Arthur asks for are all part of this constellation of mandalic totems according to Herring.

Some like Joseph Jones have extended the motif to the structuring of the novel as well. "The novel is divided into four parts, the first and the fourth parts framing the second and the third parts. The body of the novel consists of two long flashbacks in which the histories of the other main characters, twin brothers are explicated and dramatized both together and individually. The four-part structure and the central search for the meaning of the novel, which the novel self-consciously pursues, make it resemble a solid mandala"(Jones, 67).

4.3 LET US SUM UP

The androgyny and mandala motif recur in the novel, either directly or obliquely. Both point mainly to the theme of wholeness and the possibilty of totality in this world.

4.4 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the use of Tiresias as an archetypal motif with special reference to the antithetical implications the same motif has for the two brothers in the novel.

2. How does the mandala motif work in different ways, at the level of theme and structure, in the text?

3. Discuss the effectiveness of the use of Arthur's mandala dance in the text.

4.5 GLOSSARY

Androgynous: Possessing the underlying potential to develop both traits thought of as masculine and those thought of as feminine

Hermaphrodite: an entity in which the male and female rgans are found simultaneously

Lamaism: A form of Buddhism practiced in Tibet and Mongolia

Star of David: A six-pointed star formed of two overlapping equilateral triangles; a symbol of Judaism

Transvestitism: The act of cross-dressing or dressing in the attire of the opposite gender

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UNIT 5 TECHNIQUES

Structure

5.0 Objectives
5.1 Narrative Strategies
5.2 Language and Imagery
5.3 Myth, Symbol and Allegory
5.4 Humor and Satire
5.5 Voices
5.6 Time
5.7 Let Us Sum Up
5.8 Questions
5.9 References

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will introduce you briefly to some technical aspects of the novel. It is hoped that this will make you more conscious of how the text is structured and introduce you to some stylistic interpretations of the novel. It will also help you note how White alters his techniques to achieve different effects for different characters, especially for the twin protagonists.

5.1 NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

"The narrative manner of this novel is, as in all White's major work, thick with explicit particulars. Everything is embodied and illustrated. Each shade of feeling or quirk of action is solidly realised. ...The narrative technique...swoops and turns and flicks from point to point, with a logic different from simple sequence.", comments William Walsh. He goes on to draw comparisons between White's narrative technique and D.H. Lawrence's formulations on "the movement of the emotional mind" which speaks of how "...the mind makes curious swoops and circles. It touches the point of pain or interest, then swoops and circles, coils round and approaches again the point of pain or interest..." In the text, for example, the frame narrative for the 'Waldo' section is constituted by a walk the brothers take on Waldo's suggestion. The same walk during which Mrs. Dun and Mrs. Poulter had seen them in the opening section. Arthur proposes that if they hang around they might meet Mrs. Poulter and walk together to the bus. Waldo refuses the suggestion but the reference to Mrs. Poulter sets off a train of reminisces that go back to his childhood memories. The narrative from there moves back and forth between the walk and snatches from the past – for Waldo, mostly memories tinged with pain and humiliation. Walsh continues, "In *The Solid Mandala* the procedure is one of shading and emphasis, of varying the point of entrance and sweeping backwards and forwards in a way which impresses the reader as a composition rather than a linear progress."(Walsh, 86-87)

Walsh's observations apply more to the 'Waldo' section which constitutes the bulk of the text than to the 'Arthur' section which is more linear in its narrative progression. In fact Arthur's narrative opens with an "In the beginning there was the sea..."(215) with its Biblical intonations echoing the opening words of the book of Genesis. Carolyn Bliss too discusses White's technique of producing an "evocative blending of a novel's themes and motifs in a single scene, a practice which seems to owe as much to music as to literature." She cites one of the best examples for this as coming

"from *The Solid Mandala*, for, in Arthur's mandalic dance, imagistic motifs associated with each major character and with several thematic concerns are counterpointed in a comprehensive pattern which centres the novel's meaning in a possible order, harmony and wholeness"(Bliss, 198-9). To bring out the hieratic nature of Arthur's apprehension of reality, White infuses the narrative with religious allusions, quasi-sacramental motifs and a heightened sense of poetry. This is however juxtaposed with the demotic nature of the icons through which this apprehension of reality is purveyed. The demotic and hieratic, the mundane and the elevated are shown to be part of one whole.

5.2 LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

White's style and content bespoke a new voice in the Australian canon. It was both ironical and whimsical; not to mention almost surrealist in the 'Arthur' section. The novel, *The Solid Mandala*, is a minor epic about common life infused with the mystical lyricism and pulsating prose poetry of the 'Arthur' section. The thick texture in the idiom is evocative of character and social ambience in the narrative framework. William Walsh discusses White's use of language in the context of the rest of his oeuvre: "To go from *Riders in the Chariot* to *The Solid Mandala* (1966), is to move from a novel which is spacious and inclusive to one in which the field of action is confined, in which the language is more abstinent, the metaphorical habit less florid, the manner altogether trimmer and sharper....This spare novel – spare by Patrick White's standards, that is – is one of the most beautifully organized of White's works and one marked by an unusual blend of inwardness and control, life and impersonality" (Walsh, 85).

The use of alternative techniques to portray the twins at the centre of the narrative's dialectic continues at the level of the stylistic and figurative use of language as well. A.M. McCulloch notes how "White describes Waldo with a language that matches the character's primness, neatness and love of order"(McCulloch, 48). Waldo is etched, with limpid precision of the prose, as a man whose "thin, male steps crunched. He walked primly, in the sound of his oilskin, planning in advance where to put his feet"(27). When he had worked at the Sydney Municipal Library for a while he consciously projected the image of "the neat, the conscientious type, tie knotted rather small, the expanding arm-bands restraining the sleeves of his poplin shirt"(69). He is repetitively described in strong olfactory imagery as being aware of the smell of mucus in his own nostrils, rotting wood and cold fungus (26-7, 56) and in the library of decaying, aged flesh (121).

Thelma Herring warns against seeing the recurrent mordant imagery of the 'Waldo' section as all pervasive as "in Arthur's part the prose is free of it but is rich in images of religious associations"(Herring, 74). She notes however, that "Traversing most of the twins' life-span of seventy-years, from the time when their parents bring them from England as small children, the story is from one point of view a chronicle of senescence and decay. Both parents die, the weatherboard house that George Brown has built for himself on arrival begins to disintegrate, the young quince trees become wormy and woody, the sea of grass encroaches more and more, the young dogs, like the brothers themselves, grow old and feeble: in Waldo's part, startling images of squalor and decay (mice nesting in burst leather chair, mutton fat curdling in skeins, and so on enforce the impression of lives petering out in sterile loneliness (but also reflect the mental obliquity of Waldo)" (Herring, 74). This is shown to be a matter of Waldo's perspective and the point of view he brings to bear on life. The images are indicative of Waldo's spiritual decay and enervation.

McCulloch commenting on the sensuous imagery used in association with Arthur says, "Arthur seems to be the essence of the senses themselves. White communicates this by descriptions of Arthur which are markedly different in texture from those

reserved for Waldo." Arthur is able to hear and *"see* in advance the splotches of sound"(232); he "would roll on his seat in time with the buggy long before its motion called for it"(234); can "smell the smell of cold mud"(246) and "sing shapeless songs"(251). "The language used for the "Arthur section" succeeds in interrelating the senses when touching the world" (McCulloch, 34). As in the case of Waldo, these images reflect Arthur's character and the way in which he frames reality.

Moving to a more general apprehension of how the book uses figurative language, Carolyn Bliss offers an interesting intervention on the subject. "White sometimes fashions a continuum of imagery, from the ant on the pavement to the sun in the sky, which sets man as a middle term and suggests that all share the same vital impulse. Alternately, actions may illuminate each other by their contiguity. For example, in *The Solid Mandala*, Mrs. Feinstein tells Arthur and Waldo about visiting her European relatives:

> 'I don't know what Daddy would have to say to so much Jewish emotionalism. I was thankful we did not have him with us, either in Paris or Milan. Poor things, *they* are devout.' Mrs. Feinstein smiled for the sick, though it could have been she enjoyed the illness. 'Of course we did whatever was expected of us while we were there. We did not have the heart to tell them we have given up all such middle-aged ideas, to conform,' she said, 'to conform with the spirit of progress. Daddy , I am afraid, who is more forceful in his expression, would have offended.'
> After that she disappeared, trailing the outdoor coat she was wearing. It was so out of place. It was so shapeless it might have been inherited. (p. 132)

Simply by appending the trailed, 'inherited' coat to Mrs. Feinstein's smugly modern point of view, White comments ironically on her hope that the inheritance of faith may be discarded. At the same time, the repetition of the word 'conform' suggests that her modernism reflects nothing more than capitulation to a new kind of pressure"(Bliss, 198). Such subtle use of imagery infuses the text with nuances that can be picked up only with multiple and careful reading, as well as creative interpretation. As in the case of Arthur's marbles, it involves seeing the possibilities of the putatively mundane.

5.3 MYTH, SYMBOL AND ALLEGORY

Patrick White's avowed desire to rise above realistic writing and discover the poetry and mystery encapsulated in ordinary lives has made him extensively use mythopoeic elements in his works. His works embody a structure or framework linked to myths and parallel motifs. *The Solid Mandala* is no exception, though how exactly he has employed these elements and to what effect remains a matter of interpretation. He has drawn on Christian motifs, beginning with the Adam and Eve motif in *The Tree of Man* right through to the crucifixion motif in *Riders in the Chariot*. Marshall Best sees a continuation of this trend in his interpretation of the relationship of the two brothers. "In *The Solid Mandala*, still absorbed with aspects of the problem of personal identity, he tried out his own version of the Cain and Abel legend in a story of two contemporary brothers"(Best, 692). Patricia Morely interprets that same relationship as allegory. "On the allegorical level there is the further connotation of the mystery of the relationship between man's body and soul, identified with Arthur and self-will, identified with Waldo"(Morley, 5).

Equally significant is White's ability to invest an ambience of myth and cosmic symbolism replete with allusions to many kinds of religions - ancient, modern, Eastern, Western around the most mundane of situations. Life itself becomes a series of epiphanic moments for Arthur. For example, when Arthur delivers groceries, Mrs. Feinstein offers him lemonade and asks him to "drink it slowly and concentrate" so

he can "extract the *prana* from this lemonade"(241). Some of this is again a matter of interpretation and having an eye for details. For example Walsh says, "The bus journey has in it a certain ritual quality, as though the two ladies were not only beating the bounds of the terrain of the novel but defining its sensibility"(Walsh, 85). Similarly, Thelma Herring comments, "The symbolic use of physical characteristics is in fact a marked feature of the novel. Arthur's brown eyes link him not only with his gentle father but also with Dulcie, Len Saporta, and their children... while Waldo with his "inherited eyes", pale and cold, is linked with the mother whose aristocratic connections fascinate him, and feels an affinity with other blue-eyed people"(Herring, 79).

5.4 HUMOUR AND SATIRE

In dealing with the serious themes he has in hand Patrick White lapses into the humorous mode very subtly and across a wide range, if at all. There is the social satire of the portrayal of the petty materialism and shallow perspectives of ordinary Sarsaparillites like Mrs. Dun. There is the homely humour of the lesser local characters like the eccentric Mrs. Musto or the snobbish Miss Dallimores when they come to tea with the Browns. There is the element of social comedy in the awkward visits of the brothers to the Feinsteins with Waldo desperately trying to maintain a façade of pseudo-respectability and Arthur's childish candor spoiling the intended effect. There is the confluence of rhetoric and mantric utterance, as in the lemonade-*prana* episode when Mrs. Feinstein just afterwards adds the rationalist caveat "Of course we don't know exactly if this is a practice which has been *scientifically approved of*, but it's a nice idea, don't you think?" The dark, almost pathetic comedy of Mr. Brown inadequately trying to tell Waldo about the facts of life and ending up telling him about precautions he should take with public lavatories.

Andrew Riemer puckishly points out that the religious intensity of Arthur is at times played out against a backdrop of suburban satire. "White spoke with many voices. What has been difficult for some to recognize is that strain of mordant comedy that accompanies many of his metaphysical peaks, enriching rather than diminishing the intensity of those moments. When Arthur Brown's concentration on the mystery of things in *The Solid Mandala* is momentarily diverted by a farting dog, the indecent and the indecorum somehow allows us to accept the validity of this outrageous fable, an account of the quest for salvation in the pedestrian outer suburbs of Sydney" (in Joyce, 158-9).

5.5 VOICES

White, in the novel, employs a patois of voices and narrative points of view. The range extends from omniscient focalization, where the narrator can focalize the point of view of any character, to narration through internal point of view, presented in terms of the feelings and perceptions of characters. So most of the time, the voices are of intradiegetic narrators like Waldo, Arthur and Mrs. Dun who are personally involved in the action being narrated. This is laced with the barely distinguishable extradiegetic omniscient narrator with no involvement in the action but comments on it from the outside. The interpenetration of both points of view acts to establish balance in the composite narrative point of view. It reveals that there are ever so many stories or perspectives that emerge from an ostensibly simple single story.

Carolyn Bliss notes how shifting modes of focalization bring about shifts in our perspectives as well. "The opening section, 'In the Bus', consists of nervous small talk which Mrs. Poulter makes while riding the bus with her new friend Mrs. Dun.

We approach the Brown brothers as these women do, at the distance of gossip and by way of a quick glimpse from a bus window. Even the excruciatingly painful and personal events of the final section come to us filtered through the responses of others: horror and nausea of the police sergeant and his young assistant, the terror of Mrs. Dun, the ribaldry of the drunks in the alley, and the unfeeling officiousness of the librarians.... In both outer sections, the reader is kept at a certain remove"(Bliss, 101-2). For the inner sections, Caroline Bliss notes, he uses "indirect discourse, in which the narrator's voice speaks in phrases and cadences which would be used by the character, thereby disclosing feelings, values and reactions...one of White's favorite methods for maintaining an ironic perspective on character and one of the sharpest weapons in his satiric and comedic arsenal" (Bliss, 102). There are constant shifts between authorially endorsed narrative and indirect discourse. Bliss argues that the use of indirect discourse is strategic for there is no other way to penetrate Waldo's reserve and Arthur's ramblings. "Because Arthur is born to his visionary status, he is subjected to very little of the irony White trains on his protagonists. Waldo, on the other hand, is treated with satire more biting and a contempt more unmitigated than any previous protagonist has undergone"(Bliss, 114).

White also reproduces the speech and thought of characters, using the colloquial idiom. The novelist's cool ironic mocking voice is heard in comments like "The girl Dulcie was probably poor. In her pink, as opposed to white, dress. Not that he doesn't despise Dulcie as well. In his crusade of bitterness there was only room for one ardent pauper."(89) or "Nobody remembered her husband, or knew whether she had ordered him out of existence so that she might enjoy a breezy widowhood"(85). White never attaches himself to the flow and pulse of his character's lives as a result of which he seems to mime their thinking at times making his explicit commentary seem even more supercilious and lacking in magnanimity especially in the case of Waldo.

In the novel, White lends Waldo his caustic wit to make judgements that characterize Waldo's vindictive malice more than the person on whom the judgement is passed. As when Waldo finally realizes he has lost out on Dulcie and envisions her as Saporta's wife.

> He did look back just once at Mrs. Saporta, increasing, bulging, the Goddess of a Thousand Breasts, standing at the top of her stairs, in a cluster of unborn ovoid children. This giant incubator hoped she was her own infallible investment. But she would not suck him in. Imagining to hatch him out. ...So much for Dulcie Feinstein Saporta and her lust for possession."(157)

Adrian Mitchell says that these shifts in narrative focus can be read as having a rather postmodernist effect of undermining the 'truth' claim of any one perspective. "Ambiguously, the story *is* the set of events, at yet another level the story is only a record of the set of events, an interpretation. Hence White's fondness for alternative versions or accounts of central events - most obviously in *The Solid Mandala*"(Mitchell, 13). This perspective bring into play a combination of voices and points of view allowing the reader to make his or her own assessments, if at all.

5.6 TIME

"The novel swoops backwards and forwards in time... with the fleeting but severe logic of poetry or life."(Walsh, 86) Time shows an element of repetitive frequency by which same events are narrated several times in the novel. This also falls within the postmeodernist contestation of time as linear and unitary.

Carolyn Bliss offers an in-depth analysis of the deployment of the time factor in *The Solid Mandala*. "The 'Waldo' section is told largely as a series of flashbacks

stimulated by incidents that occur while the elderly brothers take their daily constitutional. This walk, which occupies nearly two thirds of the book, takes place probably only a few days or weeks before the murder attempt, with which the 'Waldo' section culminates. White accomplishes two things by organizing Waldo's section in this manner. First, he gives us a sense of the stagnation in Waldo's life: so much time, so much talk, so little motion. Waldo lodges himself in the imagination, endlessly plodding but never progressing. Secondly, because chronology is utterly disrupted, we sense the incoherence and anarchy which Waldo's nihilism has wrought.... Narrative method here effects a kind of mimesis of the inner being....

Where the 'Waldo' section was disjointed, its events standing isolated and discrete, 'Arthur' is cohesively chronological. Even in the case of the occasional brief flashback, the relationship of events to time and to each other is preserved"(Bliss, 106). She continues,"Structurally, the novels tend towards episode and epiphany...The episodic progress of plot, interrupted by frequent and sometimes unexplained gaps in time, suggests a world in which human actions are rarely attuned to nature's rhythmic constancy...his tendency to disrupt chronology (as in *Riders in the Chariot, The Solid Mandala* and *A Fringe of Leaves*)...support a view of human experience as discontinuous and fragmentary"(Bliss, 197).

5.7 LET US SUM UP

This section, it is hoped, has given you some indications of the technical finesse that has gone into the effective presentation of themes and characters. White employed a range of devices and techniques making the text a rich quarry for stylistic analysis. Most of the technical aspects used are directed towards simultaneously comparing and contrasting the twins even as it is shown that they are inextricably linked.

5.8 QUESTIONS

1. Elaborate with examples how the text uses language and imagery for characterization.

2. Is the use of myths and symbols convincing in *The Solid Mandala?*

3. Discuss critically Carolyn Bliss's views on how White has used time as the structuring principle.

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UNIT 6 PERSPECTIVES

Structure

6.0 Objectives
6.1 The Twins as a Structuring Principle
6.2 Points of Criticism
6.3 Counterpoints of Defense
6.4 Let Us Sum Up
6.5 Questions
6.6 Glossary
6.7 References
6.8 Consolidated Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will look at the twins as a structuring principle in the novel and at certain critical positions on *The Solid Mandala* and Patrick White's art. Diversities of interpretative perspectives have been presented to encourage you to arrive at your own assessments.

6.1 TWINS AS A STRUCTURING PRINCIPLE

The twins have been used as a structuring principle in the narrative of *The Solid Mandala* . The tension between the brothers is comic and grave and brilliantly sustained. White at one level attempts to show the failure to combine two ways of seeing, and hence of approaching reality. The twins are as the blurb says "two people living one life. ... They shared everything – except their view of things. Waldo, with his intelligence, saw everything and understood little. Arthur was the fool who didn't bother to look. He understood." First, we see things from Waldo's point of view, and then Arthur's. Both these perspectives are further sandwiched between the outer framing perspectives of society. There is a virtuoso use of polyphonic techniques that allow the interaction of multiple voices and perspectives and dramatic structures which brilliantly juxtapose clashes of color and dissonances of tone - the dryness of Waldo and the mystical lyricism of Arthur.

William Walsh comments, "The twins are themselves divided parts of one person, and the tension which divides and unites them dramatizes the disturbance within man and within the single person. They act out that impure mixture of love and hate which is both the condition of the relationship of every human being to another and the condition of the attitude of the individual within himself to himself"(Walsh, 86). Thelma Herring concurs when she posits that "Waldo and Arthur, in fact are not ordinary twins, but rather a device for dramatizing the concept of the antithetical self.... From the technical point of view the device is handled brilliantly: the twin narratives do not ask of the reader the kind of imaginative co-operation demanded by *Voss*, but Arthur's account is a check on Waldo's, showing how his apparent blunders are deliberate (as when he calls to the dogs *after* seeing Waldo in their mother's dress, to warn him of his presence) (Herring, 74).

This antithesis pervades the structuring of the central sections of the novel, according to Edgecombe. "For if Waldo's section is longer and more discursive, less reliant on symbolism, it tends to reflect the intellectual precedence he has always assumed over his brother and the rationalism that will seek meaning through statement rather than

through sacramental imagery. The events common to both narratives... articulate most acutely the points at which the temperamental and philosophical divide between the two brothers declares itself" (Edgecombe, 62). He continues, "the twinning is one of emotional warmth to rational coolness, of approach to recession, of extra - to introversion, of inclusiveness to fastidious rejection, indeed of centrally antithetic tendencies of human nature" (Edgecombe, 64) .

Even as the text, uses the twins to personify dichotomous pulls, it also employs them at the level of structure to reiterate the inextricability of the connections. Kirpal Singh points out, "It is a mistake, I feel, to see White as an anti-intellectual. Waldo's knowledge in *The Solid Mandala* may be faulty, bigoted, narrow and perverse, but it is as necessary to a complete grasp of reality as is Arthur's morbid and childish fascination with his orange marble. Waldo and Arthur are twin manifestations of a whole that is out of joint"(Singh, 120). McCulloch too notes, "It is important to realize that neither Arthur or Waldo can exist as a whole individual without the other. Consequently there is a logical reason for Arthur ending up in a "nut house" at Waldo's death.... Waldo should not be viewed merely as a character who exists as a contrast to the true seeker, Arthur. It is through the form and structure of "Waldo's section" that we can understand "Arthur's section". Although structured separately the two parts interact, and the interdependence of the two sections reflects the necessary interdependence of the two brothers"(McCulloch, 50).

6.2 POINTS OF CRITICISM

Patrick White has been no stranger to criticism. We have had a look at some of the negative positions on him that have emerged as a result of his deviations from what was seen as the Australian literary tradition. Others have focussed more specifically on the epistemological premises that go into his world view as presented in his books. Vincent Buckley, for example found fault with his penchant for infusing cosmic implications into the quiddity of things. It is a critique that can easily be applied to a novel where marbles carry the weight of the central motif mandalic totality. "He is, I think, a victim of a mysticism of objects – or, better still, a mysticism of sensations. Far too many objects are presented as revelations; and it is through an unremitting concern with sensations that they are so presented.... This is unmistakably fine, but only a rigid control keeps it from inanity"(Buckley, 417).

Veena Noble comes out with a more pointed attack. Like Marshall A. Best who felt the novel was "stimulating but not convincing in its arbitrary re-shuffling of the brothers"(692), Veena indicates the forced thematic and character positions in the novel. "When we find ourselves not liking characters as much as the author wants us to (like Arthur and Mrs. Poulter in this novel) and liking a character more than he wants us to (like Waldo) there seem to be two factors especially at work; the author's values are too arbitrary and his presence is too obtrusive. It is the author's obligation to demonstrate to us through his portraiture and his selection of significant incidents that his values are acceptable. But White's values are too ambivalent for us to be in definite agreement or disagreement with them; and his attempts to sway us into agreement or disagreement with his mood of the moment by intrusions of his personal judgement give us small credit for an ability to arrive at our own perceptions"(Noble, 32).

She critiques the novel on the grounds that the characters are too weighed down by moral significance and mysticism which are not given foundations in acceptable human values and hence fail to be convincing. "One of White's less successful works, *The Solid Mandala* is a curious melange; an unhappy blend of mysticism and satire, it preaches the values of love but is prone at times to mockery. It holds up as saint figures a physically gross idiot and an unthinking suburbanite, and it damns a poor paranoid"(Noble, 33). She accuses White of adopting Mrs. Allwright's crotchety

stance of " Human beings are all very well"(217) by using shallow mysticism and dispensing salvation and damnation arbitrarily.

6.3 COUNTERPOINTS OF DEFENCE

Bliss is aware that the design of the novel can be critiqued for being "too patent" and of such a "programmatic quality that undercuts any sense of 'felt life'"(13) in it. But she also opposes a defense to this allegation that reads the novel as an allegory and argues for a middle ground which allows for both humanistic impact and allegorical or symbolic implications. This call to reconcile, if not collapse opposites seems very important to an appreciation of White's work. To move from thesis and antithesis to synthesis. Interestingly, *The Solid Mandala* attempts to show the stultifying effects of not doing that on a thematic level.

More positive responses to White have ranged from hyperbolic positions such as, "Patrick White remains the one who showed the way to understanding that comprehension is ubiquitous and that goodness is fragile."(Carolyn Van Langberg in Joyce, 124) to positions that attempt to account for the ambiguities in his work. "White's talents as a novelist were paradoxical in many ways: melancholy yet excitingly powerful; controlled yet furious; there was a dazzling vision and yet the most exact and precise eye for detail. It is an art prolific with symbolism and images and yet hardly concealing a palpable anxiety, sometimes a loathing for human kind."(Clement Semmler in Joyce,105)

Ken Goodwin writes, "White's corpus deals in every style from farce to tragedy, with a small number of themes but a vast number of characters. He has conducted a continuous literary protest against materialism and the dullness of realism. His positive values are an integration of the divided soul, receptiveness through genuine goodness to moments of illumination, and the struggle for creative forms capable of expressing these ideas. Novels, stories and plays tend to alternate between identifiably placed social satire and commentary and more timeless and placeless settings. No other Australian writer has displayed such capacity to hate and to love humanity or such capacity to create comic and tragic character. He has always, as he says in *Flaws in the Glass*, been, 'embarking on voyages of exploration which I hope may lead to discovery'."(Goodwin, 179) Thus perhaps the best thing about the paradoxes, dichotomies and dualities that pervade White's work is that they force you to read and to critically arrive at your own position. "Patrick White, thought-provoking and entertaining, sets us, speculating, adrift – forcing us to think for ourselves"(Elizabeth Jolley in Joyce, 138)

6.4 LET US SUM UP

Patrick White and *The Solid Mandala* are replete with dual pulls but the idea is to reflect on them, to let them make you think.

6.5 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the use of the twins as a structuring principle.

2. Is the novel programmatic in your opinion? Give reasons and examples for your positions.

3. Discuss the play of dualities at various levels in the interpretation of *The Solid Mandala*

6.6 GLOSSARY

Epistemological premises: Assumptions that underpin a framework of knowledge or point of view

Quiddity: The real nature or essence of a thing that makes it what it is

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MAEN-119
New Literatures In English

Block

8

THE STONE ANGEL: MARGARET LAURENCE

Block Introduction	
UNIT 1	
The Novelist and Her Main Thematic Concerns	5
UNIT 2	
Hager and The Theme of Self-Alienation	17
UNIT 3	
The Stone Angel: A Novel of Awakening	31
UNIT 4	
Major Aspects of the Novel	45

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This Block is the last one of the course New Literatures in English. In the four units of this Block, *The Stone Angel*, a classic in twentieth century Canadian fiction has been discussed with a view to making you understand and appreciate its salient features and distinguishing qualities. I have also attempted to introduce Margaret Laurence, the author of *The Stone Angel*, to you. The view-points of various critics and scholars, who have analysed and evaluated *The Stone Angel* from various perspectives, have also been complied in a convenient format for you in this Block.

Unit 1 will acquaint you with the biographic details of Margaret Laurence and her major works, since tracing the development of an author's canon, makes it easier to understand literature.

The purpose of **Unit 2** is to introduce the protagonist Hagar Shipley and through her character throw some light on a whole body of newly emerging literature dealing with the lives of the ageing and elderly.

Unit 3 analyses the novel with a view to establishing a connection between religious concepts and the issues related to female identity and last but not the least Unit 4 takes up some other aspects of the novel, like an analysis of the title, the use of imagery and the theme of redemption.

However you will find this material worthwhile and useful only when you have read the text of *The Stone Angel*, so do begin by reading the novel first.

UNIT 1 THE NOVELIST AND HER MAIN THEMATIC CONCERNS

Structure

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Margaret Laurence - Introduction
1.2 Biographical Details – Early Years
1.3 The African Sojourn and its Influence
1.4 The Canadian Phase
1.5 Awards and Recognition
1.6 Main Thematic Concerns
- 1.6.1 Novel of Middle Class Aspirations
- 1.6.2 View of Fate
- 1.6.3 Development of Canada
- 1.6.4 The Quest for Understanding
- 1.6.5 Freedom and Life's Meaning
- 1.6.6 Pride in Financial Success
- 1.6.7 The Theme of Exile and Communication

1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 Glossary
1.9 Questions
1.10 Suggested Readings

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will acquaint you with the biographic details of the great Canadian writer Margaret Laurence and her major works. Although the most important thing about a writer is his/her work, yet the career biographies, tracing the development of the author's canon and the evolution of of his/her reputation makes literature and its creators better understood and more accessible to students.

1.1 MARGARET LAURENCE - INTRODUCTION

Margaret Laurence is a writer of enormous stature who came out of the Canadian west at a time when the female prairie author was hardly recognized. W.H. New while writing of Margaret Laurence in his *Literary History of Canada* proclaims that the range and quality of her work made her the most recognized and accomplished of the writers of the 1960's. Michael Peterson, in his introduction to a special issue on Laurence in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* writes, that for many Canadians she has "become an eminent, a wise and generous voice providing insight into and guidance for a highly self-conscious nation in the process of reviewing its complicated history and complex character."

1.2 BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Early years:

Margaret Laurence was born Jean Margaret Wemyss on 18th July 1926, in the small Manitoba town of Neepawa. Of Scottish ancestry, her father Robert Wemyss, also born in Neepawa was a lawyer of Irish ancestory, her mother Verna Simpson Wemyss was a talented pianist and music teacher. In 1930, at the age of thirty-four, Verna Wemyss died of a kidney infection. Her unmarried older sister Margaret

Simpson returned from Calgary, where she had been teaching, to look after young Margaret and eventually became her stepmother. With her Margaret Laurence's literary career had its beginning for they read many books and talked about literature especially about Canadian literature before it was taught in Canadian Universities and Schools. In 1933 Margaret Simpson and Robert Wemyss had one son. Two years later Robert Wemyss died of pneuomonia.

In 1938 Margaret Simpson Wemyss moved the family into her eighty-two-year old father's house, where she cared for him as well as for two children. Young Margaret resented her grandfather's rigid authoritarianism. His strength was her "constant challenge to battle," as Clara Thomas has observed in her 1975 book *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*. "She was challenged, but certainly not crippled, by this old, still fierce and autocratic man; her step-mother's supportive love and encouragement and her own strong spirit, well-matched to her grandfather's strength were constant, counterbalancing dynamics towards growth and achievement."

Six years later in 1944 Margaret Wemyss left Neepawa to take a scholarship at Winnipeg's United College, a United Church arts and theology college affiliated to the University of Manitoba. During her college years as an honors English student, she had several poems and stories published in *Vox*, the under-graduate paper. At this time, as Laurence noted in the essay "Ivory Towers or Grassroots?" (1978) , she also became involved with the Old Left, a group of supporters of social reform: "My sense of social awareness, my feelings of anti-colonialism, anti-authoritarianism, had begun, probably, in embryo form in my own childhood; they had been nurtured during my college years and immediately afterwards in the North Winnipeg of the Old Left." The need to alleviate crippling social conditions that prevent man's full realization of his dignity and humanity is a constant theme of her fiction.

Having completed her graduation in 1947 Margaret Wemyss took a job as a reporter for the ***Winnipeg Citizen***, where she wrote book reviews, a daily radio column, and reports on labor events. On 13 September of the same year she married Jack Laurence, a civil-engineering graduate of the University of Manitoba.

In 1949 the Laurences left Canada for England, and the following year they went from England to Africa where they lived for seven years. In 1950 Jack Laurence was appointed Director of a dam-building project in the British Protectorate of Somaliland, now Somalia. After the initial stages of the project were finished in 1952, he felt reluctant to stay on when the remaining work could be done by a Somali engineer. From 1952 until 1957 he continued his engineering work in the Gold Coast. now Ghana. Their daughter Jocelyn was born in 1952; their son David was born in 1955. Shortly before the day the Gold Coast received its independence as the state of Ghana in 1957, the Laurences returned to Canada.

1.3 THE AFRICAN SOJOURN AND ITS INFLUENCE

The African years were a stimulating challenge and a formative influence on Margaret Laurence's literary career. The opportunity to immerse herself in a foreign culture was a welcome contrast to the prairie world that pervaded her mental landscape. As Laurence puts it in *Heart of a Stranger* (1976): "The process of trying to understand people of another culture—their concepts, their customs, their life-view is a fascinating and complex one, sometimes frustrating, never easy, but in the long run enormously rewarding. One thing I learned, however, was that my experience of other countries probably taught me more about myself and even my own land than it did about anything else. Living away from home gives a new perspective on home. I began to write out my own background only after I had lived some years away."

Though Somaliland became the setting for only one early short story "Uncertain Flowering," published in Story 4 (1953) her two-year residence there is the subject of the haunting chronicle, *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963). Completed in Vancouver in 1962, a decade after her departure from Somaliland, the book is less a travelogue or diary than a vivid re-creation of the confrontation between Canadians and Africans, between a gifted artist and the beliefs and culture of a foreign nation. Beginning as a chronicle of her time in Somaliland the book gradually becomes a portrait of a people. Each episode is a re-creation and a creation, conveying the alien world with factual fidelity yet shaping the facts through art. Again and again Laurence returns in the book to themes that permeate her fiction. She sees the Somalis living by faith, not logic, their faith being a constant source of differentiation between herself and her new world. She writes "But for myself, it did not apply, this faith, perhaps because I had never needed it the way they did. I viewed it from the outside. As far as I was concerned, God was deaf. If we did not hear the sound of each other's voices no one else would." Love is a source of another telling contrast. According to her, "Love between men and women did not here contain the dichotomy long ago imposed upon it in the western world by the church, that of separating it, as though it were oil and water into elements labeled 'spiritual' and 'physical.' And the book records many examples of the Somali ability to find resources, both materialistic and mental, to ensure personal survival.

Fascinated by the extensive oral literature of Somaliland, Laurence began translating poetry and folk tales shortly after her arrival. Her work led to a volume of translation: *A Tree for Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose* (1954), described in Laurence's introduction as "not the accumulation of the writings of centuries, but the stories of the highly imaginative race without a written language." When the book was republished in 1970, she reflected on its achievements in a new preface: "I suppose if I had known then the difficulties of translating literature, I would have not tried, but when a person is young and naïve, one will try anything, and probably that isn't such a bad thing. These translations are amateurish..., however, I think it was a good thing that the translations.. were done, partly because they constituted the first collection to be translated into English and partly because I think they do convey some sense of life and concepts of the Somali nomadic people... My main reservation about these remarks would be that I was in places unwittingly condescending in the manner of white liberals, out of pure ignorance, for Somaliland was my first contact with a culture other than my own, and I had much to learn about the validity of human differences—I still have, but at least I know it now."

Somali literature heightened Laurence's natural interest in the past and in the social and familial roots. Many contemporary African writers, she observes in *Heart of a Stranger*, "re-create their people's past in the novels and plays in order to recover a sense of themselves, an identity and a feeling of value from which they were separated by two or three generations of colonialism and missionizing. They have found it necessary, in other words, to come to terms with their ancestors and their gods in order to be able to accept the past and be at peace with the dead, without being satisfied or threatened by that past." In another decade Laurence would have begun the arduous task of chronicling the Canadian past.

Laurence set two volumes of fiction in the Gold Coast. Her first novel, *This Side Jordan* (1960), and a collection of short stories, *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963). All her African fiction centers on independence, both personal and political , and rarely has an outsider captured with such pathos the struggles and causalities of an alien world coming into self-realization. The fiction shows characters caught between the biases of their traditions and the bid for liberation. Frequently there are clashes between the imperialists viewing with skepticism and bitter resentment the Africanization of their industries and the Africans detesting their arrogant and condescending employees.

The stories in *The Tomorrow-Tamer* were written and published individually from 1954 to 1962. Some have a first-person narrator, some have a third-person narrator,

yet each narrator is an outsider, exiled from some aspect of his natural world. The outsider may be an alien to Africa or he may be an African caught up in the new technology and rendered alien to his tribal values. The point of view in each story is that of an ironist, "not the ironist who assumes superiority of understanding or sophistication of intellect and so condescends to her subjects and characters," writes Clara Thomas, "but the ironist who sees at once the immense vitality and the enormous contradictions of joy and pain, hopes and achievements, among the people of an emergent nation." (*The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*)

The chapters of *This Side Jordan* alternately concern the African protagonist, Nathaniel Amegbe, who though educated by Christian Missionaries and freed in his own mind from his tribal past, remains attached to the ways of his people, and the English protagonist, Johnnie Kestoe, the son of poor Irish Catholics, who has rejected his religious upbringing and come to the Gold Coast as an accountant in a textile firm. As their parallel stories become increasingly interdependent, the novel becomes a chronicle of war between native traditions and the values of the imperialist. Though the symmetry of the plot may be too neat, the novel has an abundance of carefully delineated and realistic characters set on a rich canvas that captures the complexity of social change.

The final dimension of Laurence's African writing is found in her critical study *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966* (1968). Here Laurence offers the best explanation for her interest in and indebtedness to African literature and culture: "Although Nigerians during the colonial period lost their own past, they never lost their land, for there were no white settlers as there were, for example, in Kenya. Whether or not this may have assisted them in maintaining some kind of inner strength and self-faith, it is impossible to know." Inner strength and self faith are the goals of the protagonists of Laurence's fiction as described in her essay "Ivory Towers or Grass Roots?" "The themes of freedom and survival relate both to the social/external world and to the spiritual/inner one, and they are themes which are both political and religious. If freedom is, in part, the ability to act out of one's own self-definition, with some confidence and with compassion, uncompelled by fear or by the authority of others, it is also a celebration of life and of the mystery at life's core."

1.4 THE CANADIAN PHASE

When the Laurences left Africa in 1957 they took up residence in Vancouver, where they lived for five years. This phase saw Laurence complete most of her African fiction and write the first draft of *The Stone Angel*, but this time was personally and mentally trying. She was starved for the company of other writers, though she did make the acquaintance of Ethel Wilson, who offered encouragement and support. Her personal life was also trying, and in 1962 she separated from her husband, taking the two children to England where they lived first in London before settling the following year at Elm Cottage, Penn, Buckinghamshire.

Distanced from Canada, she returned to the draft of *The Stone Angel*, rewrote it, and saw it published in 1964. The first of five books set in the fictional prairie town of Manawaka, the novel regarded as a classic, announced the maturity of the talent evident throughout her African fiction, but her fiction was now rooted firmly and fully in her own Canadian world.

Laurence regarded herself as a member of the second generation of Canadian writers. The first generation including Morley Callaghan, Sinclair Ross, Hugh MacIlennan, and Ernest Buckler, rejected British and American models to write. Of these writers the most significant for Laurence's writing was Ross. As she remarked to Graeme Gibson in an interview for his *Eleven Candian Novelists* (1973), when she first read

As For Me and My House (1941) in her midteens, she confronted a novel written "out of a prairie background which was very similar to mine, and I thought: it can be done."

The influence of *As For Me and My House* on Laurence parallels the influence of *The Stone Angel* on younger Canadian writers. Jack Hodgins, for example, acknowledges the importance of the novel as the first he read with a voice and a world directly related to his western sympathies. From the time of the publication of *The Stone Angel*, Laurence has represented for younger writers a voice of intelligence and discernment, a Canadian novelist interested less in social realism than in the paradoxes of the human individual. Of his early days as a writer, Dave Godfrey has commented: "At that time, I was writing very assiduously for Margaret Laurence. I had never met her, but I had this idea of an educated, sensitive, experienced reader who knew the tradition of the story and recent developments and yet was a Canadian with a feel for myth and for all those repressions and fears which hang up twelve Canadians out of ten. So I wrote for Margaret Laurence." (Dictionary of Literary Biography. Vol. 53, Gale Research Inc. Detroit, London, 1986) p.265)

The Stone Angel is Hager Shipley's personal account of the last few days of her life. With memory in a state of disordered energy, the ninety-year-old narrator unconsciously weaves episodes from her past into her painful present. The novel's structure follows the process of her mind, the entire book being composed of flashbacks occurring in a progressive chronological pattern and alternating with scenes in the present. At the beginning, Hagar is blind, like the statue of the stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery. All her life has been a display of pride as she struggles to hide her emotions and live in self-sufficient isolation. During a life time of wrangling she never learns how to express or to accept love; she tries to hide her inner failure, that she has never known the ability to rejoice. In the end, however her pride gives way to need. In Hagar, as Laurence has noted in an interview included in Donald Cameron's *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (1973), "part of her goal is simply survival to survive until the moment she dies, with some kind of dignity and some kind of human value. She always tried to put the hooks on people, to influence people, to manipulate them, her husband and her sons, and she has never really allowed them to go free, so she has never been free herself: this is what she comes to understand in the very last days of her life."

Whereas *The Stone Angel* is set in Laurence's grandparents' generation her second Manawaka novel and winner of a Governor General's Award, *A Jest of God* (1966), is set in her own generation. The narrator and protagonist, Rachel Cameron, a thirty-four-year-old single women, a school teacher, endures the long, hot summer of Manawaka. While resigned to the Presbyterian sterility of the town and the oppressive presence of her mother, she harbours a rebellious craving for love. Though her summer affair with Nick Kazlik, a schoolmate from early years who now teaches in Winnipeg, comes to an abrupt end, it has a positive effect to Graeme Gibson, "We are not God, but what Nick did for Rachel was to enable her to reach out, hold and touch another human being, which was what the sexual experience meant for her. It was the reaching out to another person and making herself vulnerable, as Rachel was able to do ultimately, with Nick, which led her to be able—to some limited extent—to liberate herself." (Gibson Graeme: *Eleven Canadian Novelists)* Laurence's novel served as the source of the 1968 Warner Bros. film **Rachel** and was republished as *Now I Lay Me Down*, during the same year.

The protagonist of the third Manawaka novel, *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969), is Rachel's thirty-nine-year old sister, Stacey Cameron MacAindra who buys a railroad ticket out of Manawaka as soon as she has saved enough money. Now through a series of flashbacks, memories, fantasies, through a mingling of first-person and third-person narrative, she examines her tangled life in Vancouver. Instead of the anticipated enlargement of her personal horizon, she finds enslavement to her four children, her dull husband, and approaching old age, By the end of her mental journey, however, she sees the complexity of life and the problems other people face. No longer scarred

by life, she has the will to continue living. "The fire theme threads through the novel," Laurence commented in *Heart of a Stranger*, "the fires both inner and outer, and if we are to live in the present world, we must learn to live within the fires and still survive until we die."

While writing the three Manawaka novels Laurence was also working on a series of seven short stories, "fictionalized autobiography" as she called them, which were published separately in the 1960s. Adding one further story, she collected them under the title *A Bird in the House* (1970). The protogonist, Vanessa MacLeod, is another young inhabitant of Manawaka, and the stories follow ten years in her life that coincide in part with World War II. Though Vanessa is the narrator and protagonist, the center of the book is her hard, autocratic grandfather, and his centrality underlines the importance of the stories as cathartic autobiography. "I did not realize until I had finished the final story in the series," Laurence reflected in *Heart of a Stranger*, "how much all these stories are dominated by the figure of my maternal grandfather, who came of Irish Protestant stock. Perhaps it was through writing these stories that I finally came to see my grandfather not only as the repressive authoritarian figure from my childhood, but also as a boy who had to leave school in Ontario when he was about twelve, after his father's death, and who as a young man went to Manitoba by sternwheeler and walked the fifty miles from Winnipeg to Portage La Prairie, where he settled for some years before moving to Neepawa. He was a very hard man in many ways, but he had a very hard life. I don't think I knew any of this, really knew it, until I had finished those stories. I don't think I ever knew, either, until that moment how much I owed to him. One sentence, near the end of the final story, may show what I mean. — "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins."

In 1967, Laurence turned her attention to a children's book. That story became *Jason's Quest* (1970), which she has described as "a gift" because of the rapidity with which she wrote the first draft. Jason, a mole, seeks a cure for the invisible sickness destroying Molanium and the molefolk. "Knowledge," he is told, "can be learned from books. But wisdom, now—wisdom must be learned from life itself." And the acquisition of wisdom has been central to the journey of many of Laurence's protagonists. In the late 1970s Laurence wrote three more children's books, *The Olden Days Coat* (1979), *Six Cows* (1979), *Six Darn Cows* (1970), and *The Christmas Birthday Story* (1980).

For more than a decade Laurence lived at Elm Cottage, though she made frequent visits to Canada. In 1969, when she accepted an appointment as Writer in Residence at the University of Toronto, she had already decided to return to Canada permanently when her children completed their schooling in England. Shortly after beginning the Toronto position, she bought a small cedar cabin on the Otanabee River near Peterborough, Ontario, where she spent the summers of 1971, 1972, and 1973. *The Diviners* (1974), Laurence's fourth Manawaka novel and winner of her second Governor General's Award, was written partly in the winters in England, yet mainly during the Ontario summers. In 1973 Laurence accepted an appointment as Writer in Residence at the University of Western Ontario. The following year she accepted a similar position at Trent University after she had settled permanently in Lakefield, Ontario.

The end of her decade in England and the beginning of her new residence in Canada also marked the publication of *The Diviners*, (1974) a unique portrait of Manawaka since Morag Gunn, the forty-seven-year-old narrator and protagonist, is not a woman of Manawaka. She is an outsider, a girl who comes to Manawaka and later tries to escape from it, only to realize that escape can be solely physical. When Laurence suggested that this novel might be her last or at least her last about Manawaka, she was understating its epic significance, for the novel is the culmination and completion of her investigation of the town. Her investigation comes to an end with her employment of Morag, an outsider and a novelist. Here is Manawaka from the

perspective of the writer in Manawaka. And Morag's personal search for understanding the pattern of her life complements a much larger ambition: *The Diviners* is an exploration of the role of the artist, and most important, the centrality of the past to the artist's understanding of her own position in the flux of time.

Completed when Laurence herself was forty-seven, *The Diviners* is her *bildungsroman*, the novel that records the growth, education, and maturing of the individual, frequently with autobiographical overtones. Laurence's early upbringing corresponds to the family life of Vanessa MacLeod, in *A Bird in the House*. The autobiographical dimension of *The Diviners* finds an embodiment of Laurence's ideas about art and life in Morag. For Laurence, Manawaka's creator, and for Morag Gunn, Manawaka's historian in the fictional world, art is the distillation of the private and the fictional, and the mysterious process of literary creation provides the theme and the form of *The Diviners*. At the end Morag has summoned up all her past and discovers her own place in Canada: "This place is some kind of a garden... Nonetheless, even though it may be only a wildflower garden ..." Like her creator, Morag transforms her garden into art. At the conclusion of her mental journey she "returned to the house to write the remaining private and fictional worlds, and to set down her title." With its final setting in eastern Ontario, *The Diviners* is Laurence's farewell to Manawaka, "that prairie town-which is partly my own town and partly a town of the mind." The epic dimensions of Morag's reliving of her life and, through stories and ballads, her ancestral past give the novel a quality of finality and summation that makes it a natural conclusion to its creator's imaginative involvement with the prairie town. Two years after the appearance of *The Diviners*, Laurence's collection of critical and autobiographical essays, *Heart of a Stranger* was published.

1.5 AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

Laurence's efforts and her talent have been widely recognized over the course of her career. In addition to her two Governor General's Awards, she has received the Beta Sigma Phi First Novel Award (1961), three president's medals from the University of Western Ontario (1961, 1962, 1964), a Molson Prize (1975), Periodical Distributors' Award (1977), and a City of Toronto Award of Merit (1978). Laurence has been named companion of the Order of Canada (1971), fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (1977), and recipient of honorary degrees from United College (1966), Mc-Master University (1970), Trent University (1971), Dalhousie University (1971), University of Toronto (1971), Carleton University (1974), Brandon University (1975), Queen's University (1975), University of Western Ontario (1975) Simon Fraser University (1977), York University (1980), and Victoria University (1982). In 1981 she accepted a three-year appointment as Chancellor of Trent University.

When Margaret Laurence died on January 5, 1987 she had published sixteen books along with many poems, addresses and articles in journals, magazines and newspapers.

1.6 MAIN THEMATIC CONCERNS

1.6.1 Novel of Middle Class Aspiration

Despite Laurence's left wing sympathies, despite her growing desire to address issues of dispossession and social injustice, *The Stone Angel* is very much a novel of middle class aspiration, action, and folly. Proud descendent of a family that could claim connections, a lapsed Scottish baronetcy, and self-made success in pioneering Canada, Hagar Shipley has little time for the larger questions of social order and justice. Though she oscillates like a pendulum between her personal impulses, so strong is her ethic of self-reliance that she fails to see clearly the plight of the farmers

she knows during the Depression of the 1930s or the sense of loss, and desperation of the local Metis of Manawaka. Indeed, the novel very carefully suggests that Hagar's blindness to the larger issues of social justice is typical of many people of her generation. As close as she was to the actual effects of the Depression on farmers and to the Metis friends favoured by her husband Bram and her son John, she steeled herself against any potential awareness of or empathy with such experiences. Her "respectability" threatened by them, she needs to hold herself aloof from, superior to the "bunch of breeds and never-do-wells and Galicans" she is obliged to feed during harvest time. Pride both blinds and sustains her when her social identity is questioned.

1.6.2 View of Fate in *The Stone Angel*

The Stone Angel is a study of a feisty individual forced to endure circumstances grotesquely at odds with her self-image. It enacts a capracious view of fate and presents fate as an amalgam of character and circumstance, the two forces interacting in a complex manner. The individual is certainly the victim, (in Laurence's phrase in *The Stone Angel*) "of the jokes or jests of God". These "jests" however, often have their root in individual character. In Hagar's case, "it is the pendulam like oscillation between impulses of order and disorder, respectability and passion, dynastic pride and individual need that dictate the unfolding of her life and characterize her blindness." (*Margaret Laurence : An Appreciation* p.77) God's great joke is that "one discovers so many things too late", most notably the wilderness that pride can make of a life and the self-enclosure that is the outward aspect of self-reliance. It never occurs to Hagar to ask the serious question "why" when it comes to the tyranny of social circumstances.

1.6.3 Development of Canada

In her Canadian fiction, by attending tenaciusly to the tight-fisted, unyielding, and proud Scottish spirit, Laurence touched a major nerve in the Canadian sensibility. Though *The Stone Angel* is unabashedly middle-class, Scottish and small town in its emphasis, it still captures something essential about the energy, enterprise, and mad pattern of the settlement and development that have characterised not only the growth of Manitoba but of Canada as a whole. The Scot's middle-class outlook incarnated in Jason Currie and passed on to his rebellious daughter, is the firm base upon which, in her later Manawaka novels Laurence was able, without inconsistency to integrate her developing left-wing concerns, particularly her empathy with the victims and the dispossessed who had been cast aside in the provinces and the country's growth. Michael A. Peterman rightly argues that the recognition of *The Stone Angel* "Suggests the success with which Laurence shaped her novel to present a compelling version of formative stages of Canadian identity. In linking her vision to that of her friend, historian W.L. Morton, she assimilated Morton's work with her own experience and the past of her people." (*Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation* p. 80) Laurance cites Morton's *Manitoba: A History* as the "book about my land that has meant the most to me". "When I first read(it)", she adds, "it was with a tremendous sense of exoitement, combined with an angry sense of having been deprived, when young, of my own heritage. I have since done a great deal of reading of prairie history, but it was Morton who first gave me the sense of my place's long and dramatic past". (*Books that Mattered to Me* 1981) In *The Stone Angel* the dream of dynasty, in itself both compelling and destructive, becomes a map of Manitoban and Canadian heritage.

1.6.4 The Quest for Understanding

The Stone Angel is permeated with an unflagging quest to know more to understand better, to recover and recognize what is best and most worthwhile in human experience. Michael A. Peterman says that in *The Stone Angel* "the process of and the emphasis upon recovery, the struggle to understand what has eluded knowing is made heroic, heartening and significant". (as quoted by Clara Thomas in her article

"Pilgrims Progress : Margaret Laurence and Hagar Shipley", in *Margaret Laurence an Appreciation*)

Clara Thomas looks at *The Stone Angel* as a valuable study of the enclosed "garrison culture" of North American settlements and of the religion that supported and often distorted the spirit of their people. She argues that the overwhelming question at the heart of *The Stone Angel* is "one of many-prismed conflict, between the individual's needs and demands and society's, between God's law and man's understanding and interpretation of that law, between the rule of the community and the rule of the heart, between pride and love". ("Pilgrims Process: Margaret Laurence and Hagar Shipley")

1.6.5 Freedom, Faith and Life's Meaning

Once when asked about other novelists' influence on her work Laurence could give just one name – the name of Joyce Cary. Cary was a religious novelist and the over-arching themes of all his works are freedom, faith and the revelations of life's meaning and purpose that come as gifts of grace. Shortly before his death, he described his purpose thus: "What I set out to do was to show these people, living each in his own world by his own ideas, and relating his life and struggles, his triumphs and miseries in that world. Their situation, in short, was to be that of everyone who is doomed or blessed to be a free soul in the free world and solve his problems as he goes through it....." (*The Writer and the Theme)* Margaret Laurence has written and spoken of freedom as a major theme in her work, but she has publically explored the foundation of her writing much less than Cary did and she has shown the workings of faith and grace in her character's lives rather than writing theoretically about these things. She believed with William James that "to be converted, to be regenerated to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong and inferior and unhappy becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities." (*The Writer and the Theme* p.78) *The Stone Angel* while charting the life span of Hagar describes such experiences and their effect on her.

1.6.6 Pride in Financial Success

When Hagar Shipley was a child in the 1880s, Manawaka was still close to its beginnings, with board sidewalks, oil lamps, a few successful businesses such as Jason Currie's store, institutions such as the well-tended cemetery, the everpresent undertaker and the churches, especially the Presbyterian church:

> I'd be about eight when the new Presbyterian church went up. Its opening service was the first time Father let me go to church with him instead of to Sunday School. It was plain and bare and smelled of paint and new wood, and they hadn't got the stained glass windows yet, but there were silver candlesticks at the front, each bearing a tiny plaque with Father's name, and he and several others had purchased family pews and furnished them with long cushions of brown and beige velour, so our few and favoured bottoms would not be bothered by hard oak and a lengthy service.
>
> "On this great day", the Reverend Dougall MacCulloch said feelingly, "we have to give special thanks to those of our congregation whose generosity and Christian contributions have made our new church possible."
>
> He called them off, the names, like an honour role. Luke McVitie, lawyer, Jason Currie, businessman, Freeman McKendrick, bank manager, Burns MacIntosh, farmer, Rab Fraser, farmer.

> Father sat with modestly bowed head, but turned to me and whispered very low: "I and Luke McVitie must've given the most, as he called our names the first." (*The Stone Angel*, p.15)

Pride in financial success, in "getting ahead" was inextricably linked to religion in Hagar Currie's Manawaka. The isolation of small groups of people in a vast land was one of the factors in the growth of a town's personality; in English Canada the other factor was the drive to build a progressive, successful and Protestant community. Ideals of godliness and business enterprise were closely meshed, especially so for those whose religion incorporated the old, passionately-argued Calvinistic doctrines of predestination and of the elect. Though these grim articles of faith were considerably less than ramrod strong in Canadian Presbyterians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there still existed a residual, crude but powerful belief that the elect of God, the saved, shone by their works and, therefore, the man who succeeded in the world's terms by his own labours had also succeeded in God's terms. His outward success was the sign of his favoured status among the elect. Hence Jason Currie's unremitting drive for success, his pride in it and its link to his religion:

> He was a self-made man. He had started off without a bean, he was fond of telling Matt and Dan, and had pulled himself up by his bootstraps.... *The devil finds work for idle hands.* He put his faith in homilies. They were his Pater Noster, his Apostles' Creed. He counted them off like beads on a rosary, or coins in the till. *God helps those who help themselves. Many hands make light work.* (*The Stone Angel p.*8)

1.6.7 The Theme of Exile and Communication

Margaret Atwood, one of the most formidable and well known writers of Canada states that "Margaret Laurence was no bulldozer. Nor was she the least bit interested in being a legandry figure; she was far too involved in the joys and despairs of being human." (*Survival : A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literaure*) The most important and unique talent given to human beings is the ability to communicate. But it is easier said than done. No wonder an important theme running through all the African or Canadian works of Margaret Laurence is the experience of foreignness, of the special self-recognition that comes to exiles, of the difficulty of communicating over cultural barriers. In Somaliland when she could not find any other reading material, she read for the first time the five books of Moses in a Gideon Bible. The lines "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were stronger, in the land of Egypt." lingered on, echoing through Margaret Laurence's career, summarizing much of her experience as a stranger, and taking on a new relevance when she found that "my experience of other countries probably taught me more about myself and even my own land than it did about anything else." (*Heart of a Stranger* p.11) Certainly the Somali experience, as it affected Laurence herself and other Europeans, underlies the pre-occupation with exile, from one's own land from one's adopted land, even from a traditional way of life in *This Side Jordan* and *The Tomorrow Tamer.* Always behind these stories about exiles or misfits or people thrust out of their traditional ways by the forces of change, there lurks deeper strangeness which comes from the difficulty of human communication of any kind. While writing about Chinua Achebe's preoccupation with communication she ends her study of him in this way, "there is one theme, which runs through everything he has written – human communication or the lack of it. He shows the impossibly complicated difficulties of one person speaking to another, attempting to hear—really to hear-what another is saying. In his novels we see man as a creature whose means of communication are both infinitely subtle and infinitely clumsy, a prey to invariable misunderstandings. Yet Achebe's writing conveys the feeling that we must attempt to communicate, however imperfectly if we are not to succumb to despair or madness." (*Survival : A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literaure*)

The difficulty and the necessity of communication is not only the major theme of such novels as *The Stone Angel* and *A Jest of God* and *The Fire Dwellers*, but is also a leading preoccupation of the principal characters in each of these works.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

Margaret Wemyss Laurence grew up in Neepawa, Manitoba, a small town northewest of Winnipeg. Her roots in Neepawa go back to the beginning of the town and its pioneers. Her mother died when she was four and she lost her father when she was ten. Until she went away to the United College in Winnepeg, she lived with her grandfather her step-mother and her brother. She started her writing career with the publication of poems and stories in *Vox*. She wrote for the newspaper and the radio also. She got married to a Civil Engineer in 1947 and in 1949 left Canada for England. The following year the couple left for Africa where they lived for seven years. The African years not only gave her an opportunity to immerse herself in a foreign culture they exerted a formative influence on Laurence's literary career also. Living away from home gave a new perspective on home. She was fascinated by the extensive oral literature of Somaliland. Somali literature heightened her interest in the past and in the social and familial roots as they help an individual in recovering a sense of self, an identity and a feeling of value. In Africa she translated poetry and folk tales. Laurence left Africa in 1957 and lived in Vancouver for five years. During this period she completed her African fiction and wrote the first draft of *The Stone Angel* which was ultimately published in 1964. With the publication of *The Stone Angel* her fiction now rooted firmly and fully in her own Canadian world. Laurence regarded herself as a member of the second generation of Canadian novelists. From among the first generation of Canadian writers, she found Sinclair Ross most significant. As a Canadian novelist she was interested less in social realism than in the paradoxes of the human individual. *The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God* and *The Fire Dwellers* are known as the Manawaka cycle. *A Bird in the House* is a series of short stories, 'fictionalized autobiography' as she called it. Her fourth Manawaka novel *The Diviners* is a unique portrait of Manawaka since Morag Gunn, the protagonist is not a woman of Manawaka. *The Diviners* is an embodiment of Laurence's ideas about art and life. The merits of Laurence's works and her talent won two Governor General's Awards along with many more and has secured for her a place of pride in the history of Canadian literature.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Condescending: to descend willingly from a superior position.

Imperialist: pertaining to, or of the nature of an empire or emperor.

Presbyterian: a religious body formed by the union of the secession and relief churches in 1847, included in the United Free Church from 1900, and in the church of Scotland from 1929.

Buildungsroman: a novel that records the growth education and maturing of the individual, frequently with autobiographical overtones.

1.9 QUESTIONS

1. How was Margaret Laurence benefitted by her sojourn in Africa?
2. As a second generation Canadian novelist what are the favourite themes in Margaret Laurence's fiction – both African and Canadian?
3. What are the main thematic concerns in *The Stone Angel*?

1.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 HAGER AND THE THEME OF SELF-ALIENATION

Structure

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Hagar Shipley – A Character Portrait
2.3 *The Stone Angel* as Vollendungsroman
2.4 Self-Alienation of the Elderly and *The Stone Angel*
2.5 Let Us Sum Up
2.6 Glossary
2.7 Questions
2.8 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is twofold: to introduce and discuss the enigmatic yet fascinating character of Hagar, the protagonist in *The Stone Angel* and to establish how this classic work, by making the ninety year old Hagar its heroine, has joined the newly emerging literature that deals with the lives of the aging and the elderly.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Clara Thomas in her pioneering work *Margaret Laurence* argues that the deepest well of Laurence's creative vision is her interest in and understanding of human beings, her respect for them and her compassion for their everlasting terrors. *The Stone Angel* the first of Laurence's Manawaka works has received more critical attention than any of her other writings. Opinions are divided as to the success of the novel's technique but critics are unanimous in their praise for Laurence's creation of the novel's central character, Hagar Shipley, who reigns as queen of all characters in Canadian literature. According to Professor Read "Hagar... finally transcends fiction to the world of supra-reality inhabited by literature's great characters." He further remarks "It is the creation of Hagar Shipley that clearly marks for me at least the emergence of Margaret Laurence as a fine novelist. For the first business of a serious novelist is the creation of character. When any character slips, almost imperceptibly perhaps, beyond the realm of obvious fiction into the works of reality then the summit of the novelist's art has been achieved. Such is Hagar. She belongs in that great company that begins with Chaucer's Monk and Pardoner, Prioress and Wife of Bath and stretches through the works of the great, down to our present day. At times vicious and vulgar, irascible and prideful, stubborn and independent, she is by no means lovable; but she is capable of profound feelings and in the end demands respect." (*A Place to Stand On.* p.42) Laurence agrees with Virginia Woolf's famous assertion that the novel exists above all to express character because only there, can the drama of life, and reality itself be seized. For Laurence the novel strives "to catch vast and elusive life." To put down life or one's consciousness, fiction must dramatize the intimate, vital, and contradictory working of the human mind. A great literary work portrays the "human individual" who is inherently paradoxical amazingly strong yet often weak—the source of both wonder and pity. It celebrates his or her uniqueness by exploring his or her inner most being. This is what Margaret Laurence has done in *The Stone Angel*.

2.2 HAGAR SHIPLEY – A CHARACTER PORTRAYAL

According to Michael Peterman, Hagar is characterised in terms of the prairie. She lives as a struggling farmer's wife for some twenty four years, a rugged kind of experience known by none of Laurence's other Manitoba born but town raised protagonists. Having endured the deep rooted quarrel of her marriage and having struggled to raise her children often under difficult and impoverished conditions, Hagar feels much put upon and threatened by others in *The Stone Angel*. "I've never had a moment to myself, that's been my trouble," she thinks, but her real trouble, which she struggles to understand and to put into words, is that "she is strangely cast." Hers is a temperament torn between impulses of order and disorder, refinement and toughness, propriety and desire and impulses justified in her own mind by her pride in her family and the urgency of her own passions. The struggle of her last days is not only a struggle to maintain independence and control: it is an almost "inadvertent plumbing of the junkyard of her memory." In so doing she finds herself at last able to measure the extent of her misjudgements of those closest to her and to break out, to some small extent, of the prison of her nature.

Like her biblical namesake, Hagar wanders in a wilderness and like the stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery, the prairie town where she grew up, "she was doubly blind, not only stone but unendowed with even a pretense of sight." (*p.*3) At ninety, when the book begins, she is grotesque with the fat ugliness of her old age, and her nature is twisted and distorted by the self-willed tragedies of her life. She is a proud, bitter, sick, and frightened old woman with a whip-lash tongue to cut and mock, even at herself. Above all, she is "rampant with memory": and she is still, and desperately, rampant with life. We share in her last short and bitter struggle to maintain her independence; more important, we share in her halting, unwilling, rebellious journey toward self-knowledge and, finally, peace.

The actual events of the novel take place over a short time span—two, perhaps three weeks. But in the sharp struggle of these last days, Hagar recalls, defends, questions, and finally accepts and understands all the events and the feelings that have always been important to her. She moves from the present to the past and back again, with an ease that is completely familiar to those who have listened to and watched the old. The anxiety, lest she confuses past and present and so prove herself to be as "queer" and incapable as her own son and daughter-in-law think her to be, is familiar too. To one caught up in her struggle, her climaxing, temporary defeat-and-release in irrationality, when she confuses past and present and speaks the healing, forgiving words to her companion in flight (whom she mistakes for her dead son, John), is quite simply, unbearably moving.

Hagar lives with her son, Marvin, and his wife Doris, both of them well into their sixties, in a house in Vancouver which she worked for and bought; a house which is the sum of all her achievements. Its familiarity, its possession, and the tokens it holds from the past—the oak chair that belonged to her father, Jason Curie; the cut glass decanter, her wedding gift from Bram Shipley are the only solid evidences of identity that Hagar now possesses: "If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed here, eternal enough for my purposes, then I do not know where I may be found at all." (*p.*36)

But she is ill, stabbed with a pain under her ribs that grips her without warning; grotesquely fat and uncertain on her feet; sometimes *incontinent*; unable to care for herself and yet resentful of Doris and Marvin's fussy care and bumbling concern; completely at the mercy of her physical debility and revolted at its manifestations; and yet merciless toward those who try to help and capable of merciless honesty toward her physical self: "I give a sideways glance at the mirror, and see a puffed face purpled with veins as though someone had scribed over the face with an indelible pencil. The skin itself is the silverfish white of the creature one fancies must live

under the sea where the sun never reaches. Below the eyes the shadows bloom as though two soft black petals had been stuck there. The hair which should by rights be black is yellowed white, like damask stored too long in a damp basement." (*p.*79)

Hagar is repellent physically and just as ugly in her cruelty toward Doris, "That Doris,... she heaves and strains like a calving cow." (*p.*31) and blind and mistaken in her judgement of Marvin "There is a boy who never gets upset, not even at what happened to his own brother. (*p.*65)" But she demands and compels sympathy, a grudging admiration and the tension of partisanship which one always accords the gallant fighter fated to lose. Only her body has aged: her spirit is indomitably young and brave. "I never got used to a single thing," she says: and her unchanging dark eyes symbolize the stubbornly vital, flaming spirit: "for when I look in my mirror and beyond the changing shell that houses me, I see the eyes of Hagar Currie, the same dark eyes as when I first began to remember and to notice myself... The eyes change least of all." (*p.*38)

The sensual aspect of Hagar's character refuses to change. Hagar at ninety is still delighted by her senses' gratification. In fact she is often greedy for them. She loves colour: the back-garden yellow with forsythia; her lilac silk dress, "a real silk, mine, spun by worms in China, feeding upon the mulberry leaves." (*p.*29) She grudingly admires Doris' food and heartily enjoys it, whatever the cost to her tired digestive system. "I eat well. My appetite is usually very good. I have always believed there could not be much wrong with a person if they ate well. Doris has done a roast of beef, and she gives me the inner slices, knowing I like it rare, the meat a faint, brownish pink. She makes good gravy, to give her due. It's never lumpy, always silken brown. For desert we have peach pie, and I have two helpings. Her crust's little richer than I used to make, and not so flaky, but quite tasty nevertheless." (*p.*67)

Colours, sounds, smells come to her as vividly as they ever did, from her past and from her present; and the old woman is still almost miraculously identifiable as the same Hagar who had begun to enjoy sex very soon after her marriage, though she was too proud to let Bram, her husband, know it. When she had finally taken John and left Manawaka and Bram, "I'd waken, sometimes, out of a half sleep and turn to him and find he wasn't beside me, and then I'd be filled with such a bitter emptiness it seemed the whole of night must be within me and not around or outside at all. There were times when I'd have returned to him, just for that." (*p.*160)

Clara Thomas rightly argues that it is an enormous affirmation of living and feeling that Hagar makes, and to its energy one cannot help responding. Nor can one help a response compounded of pity and wonder at her stubborn gallantry and at the pathos and irony of a recurrent double-exposure image of Hagar—old, ugly, chained, and earthbound by her physical disintegration and young, vivid, strong, as untamed as a hawk: "yet now I feel that if I were to walk carefully up to my room, approach the mirror softly, take, it by surprise I would see there again that Hagar, with the shining hair, the dark-maned colt off to the raising ring, the young ladies' academy in Toronto." (*p.*42)

Hagar lives in battle, pitted against everyone who comes close to her and, tragically, she betrays them all—her father, her brothers, her husband and her sons, even John, the younger one, whom she loves and would have helped. But by that time her pattern is set and she does not know the way. The pride that destroys her relations with others is established in the first paragraph of the novel as her father's error also. Like her father's enormous will, Hagar's too is directed towards mean objects, towards "getting ahead" and being a name and a force in the microcosmic, claustrophobic world of Manawaka.

She takes and treasures the ancient battle-cry of the Currie clan, "Gainsay who Dare," but ironically, her "daring" is the destructive defiance of her marriage to Bram Shipley, against her father, against the town which she pretends to despise, and very

shortly against Bram himself. She thinks her son, John is heir to the old spirit of the battle-cry, but she betrays him in the name of "common-sense" and "getting ahead." So John dies, daring all right, as does Arlene whom he loves; but in a stupid, pointless, drunken dare—in hopeless rebellion against hostile circumstances which Hagar has partially contrived.

William New describes Hagar as an essentially tragic figure, and her moment of truth as the deepest point of her tragedy: "Joy is for the Sarahs of the world; but she is Hagar. Her identity will not allow it." (*Introduction p.*lx) Patricia Morle does not endorse this view of Hagar. According to her this interpretation of the biblical archetype slights the tension in Hagar's character. It also disregards the novel's tragicomic tone and most important, Hagar's movement towards freedom in the closing chapters. "Tragic narrative ends in the isolation of the protagonist, while comedy depicts the social integration of the individual. Integration includes an advance in self-knowledge." (*Margaret Laurence: The Long Journey Home)*

The closing chapters chronicle Hagar's gradual reconciliation with her world and herself. At Shadow Point, where Murray Lees's story of losing his infant son in a fire releases her memories of John's death, Hagar speaks to Murray the apology she owes to her son. Sensing her confusion, Murray plays John's role just as Hagar's brother Matt had taken on their mother's role when Dan died. In this replaying of the past, Hagar is permitted to tell John/Murray that his lover Arlene is, after all, welcome in their house. Hagar's descent into her shadow self, a kind of rites de passage, ends with repentence, confession, and peace: "I could even beg God's pardon this moment, for thinking ill of Him sometime or other." (*p.*248) In Laurence's words one can almost equate inner freedom with growth. While Hagar fails to reach this inner freedom she is never a pathetic victim. Although she is too old and obdurate to change, she does come to understand herself – her pride, her fear, loneliness and her lack of freedom. At the end she recalls doing only two "truly free" acts, which she calls a Joke and a Lie. Clearly, Hagar refers to fetching the bedpan for the girl in her hospital room; and blessing Marvin, assuring him that he has been a better son than John and stands first in her affection. These two acts are altruistic, directed outwards in the effort to comfort another person.

Hagar's free acts are actually far more numerous. They include many small gestures in the closing chapters. Hagar gives her saphire ring to her grand-daughter Tina. She forgives Murray for betraying her hiding place in the cannery. She thanks the clergyman, despised earlier, for singing in the hospital and tells Doris that she has done her good. This is not to say that Hagar's pride is banished. She calls herself unregenerate: "the same touchiness rises within me at the slighest thing." (*p.*293)

Towards the end of the novel Hagar admits that she always wanted "simply to rejoice" (*p.*292) But she never could do that because "pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touch. Oh my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or by mine? Nothing can take away those years." (*p.*292) *The Stone Angel* does not end in this revelation though it is the tragic climax for Hagar, the moment of truth for her and for the reader, the moment of a cathartic release. There is, in the short time left before her story ends, time and opportunity for her to take the steps towards restitution which she needs and to accept the evidence of love that she has always wanted. Marvin cannot rise above the hackneyed common place in speech, but Hagar, who always despised his inarticulateness as she hated his father's vulgarity of language, can now see through the words to the spirit and is, at last, able to rejoice.

> A pause, and then Marvin replies.
> "She's a holy terror," he says.
> Listening, I feel it is more than I could now reasonably have expected out of life, for he has spoken with such anger and such tenderness. (*p.*305)

A strongly-marked sacramental pattern moves with benign irony through the novel. The spirit of the religion which Hagar had known only in an emptiness of form takes her through repentance and confession, from the prison of self to the moment of knowledge pointing towards freedom, and on to the simple but single acts of restitution which do give her a sense of freedom. And the pattern culminates as Hagar does lose her life to find it, in the splendid, strongly-marked symbols of the final lines—a fighting, dying, stubborn old woman, a glass of water, the cup of life, the grace of God: "I wrest from her the glass, full of water to be had for the taking. I hold it in my own hands. There There And then..." (*p.*308)

Life does not often offer us such a rounded completeness of pattern, though life does most strangely answer the demands of the will. Fortunately, there is art, opening up glimpses of the whole, burning away fear and pity to make places for acceptance, charity and the power to go on.

Symbolically, Hagar is, of course, a wanderer in the wilderness through her own willfullness. Like the biblical Hagar, the second wife of Bram Shipley, resents and despises the memory of the first one just as the biblical Hagar resents Sarah, Abraham's wife. Bram Shipley, with his failure farm, is no patriarch—though sadly and ironically, he wishes to be one and hopes their first child will be a boy: "It would be somebody to leave the place to," he said. "I saw him with amazement that he wanted his dynasty no less than my father had." (*p.*101) Hagar flees Bram and the farm and lives self-exiled with her son John.

Hagar is a tragic figure finally redeemed. But more than that she is real, with an energy of presence that does burst the frame it is held in, to communicate its power, its pathos and its vitality directly, like a blow or a sharp cry. She is also, as her story begins, grotesque, as the stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery, erected from pride and not from love. Hagar's is a grotesquerie within the real, not beyond its bounds in fairy-tale. Hers is a distortion of normality, the form monstrous without its appropriate spirit; only with hard-won humility does she moderate from enormity to humanity. Patricia Morley rightly argues that, "Seeking freedom, Hagar forges more chains, seeking community she builds psychic walls. Her final self-knowledge accompanies the breaking of these bonds, as Hagar is released into love, death and the new life suggested by images of rebirth and transformation". (*Margaret Laurence: The Long Journey Home*)

George Eliot spoke of the process of writing a novel as a movement towards conceiving "with that directness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness of sense." In her conception of Hagar and in her telling of Hagar's story, Margaret Laurence has done just that—and her subject required the particular directness which Laurence commands best. Hagar exploited a talent that rushed to her creation with the flamboyant vigour and perception and completely answered the requirements of Hagar's total reality.

George Woodcock calls Laurence a "Canadian equivalent to Tolstoy." Both writers, Woodcock argues, have a panoramic sense of space and history, an ability to preserve lost times and worlds so that outsiders can imaginatively apprehend them. He argues: "... their characters are as impressive as their settings, and their best revelations are achieved not... by explicit statements of historic themes, but rather by the vivid, concrete yet symbolic presentation of crucial points of instinct in individual lives, such as... the moment in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* when the despised minister, Mr.Troy, sings the first verse of the Doxology to Hagar Shipley during her last days in hospital..." (*A Place to Stand On*)

Woodcock concludes that Hagar's recognition of her need to rejoice and her inhibiting pride are intensely personal, yet at the same time one can generalize her situation into a description of the state of mind of a whole generation of English

speaking Canadians. To quote Patricia Morley again: "Hagar Shipley is the first in a series of memorable women. In five closely connected works of fiction Laurence presents universal concerns in terms of Canadian experience over four generations. She allows us to see into the hearts of her individual characters, their society, and ourselves." (*A Place to Stand On*)

To provide us an opportunity to peep into the psychic tumult of her protagonist Margaret Laurence opts for the first person narrative. It can be a limiting device in the hands of a lesser artist but Laurence uses it to the hilt as it provides her an opportunity to reveal to the reader more of Hagar than she knew herself, as her judgements about everything are so plainly and strongly biased. For the same purpose the flash-back method is employed. Laurence believed that the flash-back method suited an elderly protagonist who lives largely in the past. The chronological structuring of Hagar's memories provides clarity and unity to the novel and an immediacy to the past. A more pressing reason for depending on Hagar's voice is its poetic quality. Laurence admits "I finally came to the conclusion that even people who are relatively inarticulate, in their relationships with other people, are perfectly capable within themselves of perceiving the world in more poetic terms. So I let her have her way." ("Gadgetry or Growing...p.6)

2.3 *THE STONE ANGEL* AS VOLLENDUNGSROMAN

Vollendungsroman as defined by Constance Rooke is the novel of "completion" or "winding up." *The Stone Angel* is regarded as the central or prototypical example of the genre, for a number of reasons. One of the most distinguishing aspects of "Vollendungsroman, in *The Stone Angel* is the kind of alliance between the elderly character and the author—as language itself becomes the agent of affirmation," says Rooke. (*Crossing the River. p.*3)

A special intensity (resulting from the proximity to darkness) characterizes the Vollendungsroman. The writer's imagination is challenged by the prospect of the character's demise, and by the need to "capture" a life before it vanishes. Behind this, and quite apart from the question of the author's own age, is undoubtedly the spectre of the writer's own aging and prospective death. Writing is always an act directed against death; it may become that more specifically and more urgently when the writer's subject is old age. Thus, we feel strongly the need that Laurence feels to let her elderly protagonist speak "before [her] mouth is stopped with dark".

The act of speech operates in the Vollendungsroman in several ways. Broadly or metaphorically speaking it is all of the writing performed on the protagonist's behalf by the novelist; more literally, it includes the inner (silent) discourse of the protagonist; finally, of course, it is all speech performed out loud by the elderly protagonist. Speech of this most literal kind may be divided further. Often there is something that must be said to other characters in order to free them for their own lives; this is illustrated by Hager's statement to Marvin that he has been "good to [her], always. A better son than John". (*p.*304) And it is typical of the Vollendungsroman that the truth of this crucial speech is gone. An imprecise formulation—even a lie, though Hagar speaks more truly than she knows-is not only preferable to silence, but all that can be hoped for. If Hagar fails "to speak the heart's truth", she fails in part because we all necessarily fail—and because language fails always. Still it is what we have. Through language, we communicate some portion or version of "the heart's truth" and so become visible, assuming a more or less reliable shape in one another's eyes—so that Marvin, in his turn, can remark to the nurse that his mother is "a holy terror", (*p.*304) and Hagar can feel this accolade as "more than [she] could reasonably have expected out of life, for he has spoken with such anger and such tenderness." (*p.*304) However imperfectly, Hagar and Marvin connect in

time through language and such moments have a heightened importance in the Vollendungsroman, where time is running out.

It is also characteristic of the Vollendungsroman that the elderly protagonist is tormented by the memory of characters who have died before some vital message could be delivered or received. Thus, Hagar wants Bram to know she loved him and wants John to know that she regrets the plot to separate him from Arlene. And it is too late. But *The Stone Angel*, like other Vollendungsromans, supplies amelioration through delayed and displaced speech, as figures like Murray Lees appear to take the words that Hagar needs to give. None of this can change the damage she has done to others in the past; "Nothing can take away those years", as Hagar knows full well, unleashing the savage irony that she hears in the minister's words of comfort. Yet language can begin to repair the damage Hagar has done to herself. Speech acts, exchanged with surrogate figures, help her to see what might have been and what she is capable of being even now. They collapse time, even as they enforce its tragic necessity, and reveal to Hagar her continuing potential for connectedness in the human family. They point both to the past in which she might have spoken thus, and to the present in which she does.

Hagar thinks that she is "unchangeable, unregenerate. I go on speaking in the same way, always"; (*p.*293) thus her problem with speech is as much with what she says as what she fails to say, and her problem is that in both ways she separates herself from others. Following this self-accusation, however, Hagar withdraws her dismissive remark about the minister- "We didn't have a single solitary thing to say to one another"- and admits to Doris that "He sang for me, and it did me good." (*p.*293) Interestingly, the hymn that Hagar had requested of Mr.Troy is the one "that starts out all people that on earth do dwell", (*p.*291) thus the "single solitary" state of alienation and failed speech is pierced by chords addressing all. The song here—as often in the Vollendungsroman—seems to bridge the gap between silence and speech, bringing into consciousness the individual's yearning for community. It propels Hagar into the kind of recognition which occurs most frequently for the elderly protagonist, a need to shake off the "chains within" and welcome joy.

Words that are delivered to surviving characters, messages that are routed to the dead through intermediaries (so that the elderly character may be delivered from the burden of silence or mistaken speech), talk in which the aged protagonist may exercise a freer version of the self—these are some of the speech acts that point toward affirmation in the Vollendungsroman. Always, they are imperfect or imprecise. But that is necessarily the case, since the Vollendungsroman negotiates between speech and silence, between the lived and unlived life since desire is never satisfied. What seems to matter is that it be expressed.

Hagar's life has been more mistaken than most—her story more unspoken and misspoken—but the distance she feels between what her life has been and what it would have been is entirely typical of the Vollendungsroman. Constance Rooke has coined this German neologism for the novel of old age, of "completion" or "winding up," with a certain measure of irony, since a characteristic of these texts is the recognition that human projects are never completed. Time runs out, as pages do. Only rarely does such a text conclude with a ringing endorsement of what the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson refers to as the old person's "one and only life." *The Stone Angel*, in which Hagar is struggling desperately to change and grow, in which categorically she refuses to gloss over her mistakes and deprivation, is a typical case. Art here reflects and seeks to compensate for the incompletion of a human life.

Simone de Beauvoir, however, in *The Coming of Age*, takes a very different view of the uses of the elderly in fiction: "If an old man is dealt with in his subjective aspect he is not a good hero for a novel; he is finished, set, with no hope, no development to be looked for ... Nothing that can happen to him is of any importance." (*Essays in*

*honour of Margaret Laurence. p.*210) Novels like *The Stone Angel* prove her wrong. But what is particularly striking in this statement is the notion that elderly protagonists cannot engage our interest if "dealt with in [their] subjective aspect." For this is exactly the "aspect" of old age that contemporary fiction chooses to reveal. When the closed subject becomes an open book, when the mask of stereotypical old age is torn away and the icon stirs, when the elderly character in fiction is allowed to reveal herself as subject, we discover that indeed there is "development to be looked for." In the case of *The Stone Angel*, that development is "looked for" by all—author, character, and reader.

The Stone Angel gives us the elderly protagonist from the inside. A cantankerous old women, Hagar Shipley is an obstacle and a problem for her family; but we take her side to a remarkable degree, because we are given access to it. We see what Hagar says and does and the effect she has on others—and much of that we would judge harshly; but because Hagar is allowed to tell her own story, because we enter her consciousness and live there, we can respond to her more fairly. We learn to value her rich sensuality and the free play of her wit; we see the other side of the coin, the capacity for joy, all the positive qualities that have been so tragically denied in Hagar's presentation of self to the world. We come to understand as well the social, familial, patriarchal, and puritanical— which have led her to this distortion. And that very pride which we deplore in its outer workings, as well as for Hagar's sake, is revealed to us as a means of survival.

Constance Rooke argues that the subject of old age is a powerful one for other reasons too. The invisibility or marginalization of old people, their reduction to stereotype, their occupation of a zone behind the mask—all of this provide special impetus to one of the writer's most crucial drives, which is to see other human beings clearly. The indignities suffered by the elderly—as their bodies betray them, as memory fails, as social power is stripped away and condescension mounts- may also stimulate the writer's need to proffer dignity through art. Any reader of *The Stone Angel* will recall how Laurence moves us inexorably from a puerile assumption of the "we"- "Well, how are we today? he inquires" (*p.*277)- to a truer sense of the tribulations of old people.

Questions such as these relate to the elderly person's claim upon a writer's empathy or compassion. But the elderly character is also attractive for a number of more 'technical' literary reasons. To begin with, she makes available to the writer nearly the whole span of a life history—as opposed to just that truncated, glibly predictive bit before the heroine decides whom to marry. She picks up the human story at a pivotal and richly dramatic point, when the evaluation of life seems most urgent, and when the old dramatic question of what comes next is most especially poignant. She may also function for the writer as a touchstone (and victim or champion) of social attitudes that have shaped our past and that operate still, even in a climate of radical revision. All of this, Hagar clearly does.

The Stone Angel is a prototypical example of the Vollendungsroman also in its extensive use of the most characteristic imagery of old age. Consider, for instance, the image of the house with which Laurence plays so elaborately;in using "tonehouse"as Aunt Doll's surname (to forecast Hagar's tenure as housekeeper in Mr.Qatley's Stone House) and in having Marvin sell housepaint (to imply an interest in appearances, which Hagar forswears when she claims the weather beaten house at Shadow Point as her own). Laurence begins her manipulation of this image with the old woman's characteristic fear of dispossession. The house is then developed as an image of the self, the societal construct and the body. What Hagar must do in preparation for her death is what Saul Bellow's elderly heroine in "Leaving the Yellow House" and countless others must do. She must wean herself from that cocoon, that entrenched idea of the self, and "admit" the forces of nature. Understandably, she is afraid. Her fear of intruders in the house is the fear of death that Laurence explores in many strands of the novel's imagery.

Other images that are typical of the Vollendungsroman include the sea (which is opposed to the house, as the site of dissolution and rebirth) and the transitional identification of Hagar as a gypsy (who makes her home in nature). Angels as figures poised between two worlds, as messengers and mediators—are also surprisingly common. Another is the mirror, which Laurence uses (again typically) in two opposing ways. On the one hand, she holds the mirror up to a literal and appalling truth-as Hagar sees in it "a puffed face purpled with veins as though someone had scribbled over the skin with an indelible pencil" (*p.*79)—and on the other hand, she permits Hagar to "feel that if [she] were to walk carefully up to [her] room, approach the mirror softly, take it by surprise [she] would see there again that Hagar with the shining hair..." (*p.*42) In these examples (and others I might have chosen), the power of the image is unleashed by a sense of rich imagery particularly-as if the image had been minted just for Hagar—and by a sense of universality.

Perhaps the most common feature of the Vollendungsroman is the life review in which narrative time is divided between past and present. The past—in which the characteristic matter of the Bildungsroman is recapitualated—typically approached and controlled through the operation of the elderly protogonist's memory. The present "mirrors" the past in a number of complex ways, as the protagonist's most basic identity themes are both reasserted and deconstructed in the final phase of life. Very often—as happens at the point of John's death—the narrative of the past will break off sharply, leaving a gap between that period and the narrative present. At such junctures the possibilities of life appear to close down, the seal of failure is imprinted, and a desirable version of the self seems unattainable. The elderly protagonist will often repress this juncture at which vitality was lost; its eventual approach, however will be another kind of turning point a courageous breaking of the seal, releasing her into a new sense of possibility.

If the character's old age is purely a framing device—if little or no attention is paid to development in the present or to the experience of being old—then the novel is not by Rooke's definition a Vollendungsroman. There are also a number of contemporary novels that focus primarily on the present time of elderly protagonists. Thus, a Vollendungsroman like Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* or Paul Scott's *Staying On* will contain elements of the life review without being structured by the process in the way what *The Stone Angel* clearly is. Generally however, a considerable portion of the narrative time is spent in the past. In this respect as in many others, *The Stone Angel* is a kind of template for the genre.

The life review is more than a structural device. It has philosophical implications that take us to the heart of the Vollendungsroman and the lives of elderly people. In 1963 one year prior to the appearance of *The Stone Angel*, Robert N. Butler published an essay called "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged," in which he posited "the universal occurrence in older people of an inner experience or mental process of reviewing one's life." He was arguing against the custom prevailing at the time, which was "to identify reminiscence in the aged with psychological dysfunction." Butler suggests that "the life review Janus-like, involves death as well as looking back" and that "potentially [it] proceeds towards personality reorganization. Thus, the life review is not synonymous with, but includes reminiscence." It includes also, as *The Stone Angel* does, a vital concern with the possibility of change.

Many of Butler's insights and clinical observations are relevant to the case of Hagar. He remarks for instance, that "imagery of past events and symbols of death seem frequent in waking life as in the dreams suggesting that the life review is a highly visual process." Inherently, then, the life review is a highly literary process as well; and Butler may be cited as supplying evidence for the interpenetration of life and art that helps to characterize the Vollendungsroman. The verisimilitude of Hagar's "poetic" voice, as register of visually proliferating images—birds and eggs, for

example, images that we associate with death and captivity and rebirth—is vindicated by Butler's work.

Butler's essay is also concerned with the question of therapeutic value in the process of the life review. He rejects the position of certain pyschotherapists that old people should not be encouraged to engage in life review, since they will only be devastated by their failures and their incapacity to repair them. He argues instead for the inherent value of "truth" and for the possibility of change at any point in the life cycle; he believes in the inevitability of the life review. Yet Butler acknowledges the risk of three kinds of people: "those who always tended to avoid the present and put great emphasis on the future... those who have consciously exercised the human capacity to injure others [and those who are] characterologically arrogant and prideful". Although harsh and incomplete this might serve as a thumbnail sketch of Hagar Shipley. It sounds logical to agree with Constance Rooke's final statement that life review has benefitted Hagar. She says, "Margaret Laurence, however would not be dissuaded any more than Hagar is herself. At risk in all these ways, Hagar profits nonetheless (and we profit) from her life review. She proceeds towards personality reorganisation." (*Essays in honour of Margaret Laurence. p.39)*

2.4 SELF-ALIENATION OF THE ELDERLY AND *THE STONE ANGEL*

The portrayal of elderly characters as self-alineated is one of the major concerns for many modern writers. Rosalie Murphy Baun has examined Margaret Laurence's fictional protrayal of women in *A Jest of God, The Stone Angel, A Bird in the House* and argues that the women's patterns of behaviour in old age are simply variations of a neurotic pattern of self-alienation. What Marcia Westkott identifies as a "core dependent character" which is gender-neutral in our culture, begins in childhood, and can continue indefinitely in a parent-child-parent cycle.

Karon Horney a Third Force psychologist in her famous work *Our Inner Conflicts* focuses largely upon three basic patterns of neurotic behaviour which the "core dependent character" can take—the complaint or dependent, the aggressive or domineering, and the detached. All three forms are found in Laurence's fiction. For example, Mrs.Cameron, Rachel's mother in *A Jest of God*, is a good example of an elderly woman in whom complaint ("moving toward") tendencies dominate. Such a person frequently controls others through his or her need of them; he may take the stance that "You must love me, protect me, forgive me, not desert me, because I am so weak and helpless." Hagar Shipley, Marvin's mother in *The Stone Angel*, offers a good example of the aggressive type ("moving against"), who denies his or her softer feelings, abhors helplessness, and seeks independence or mastery. Hagar is a superb example of two varieties of the type which Horney identifies as the perfectionist and the arrogant-vindictive and is Laurence's supreme achievement in characterization. Mrs.Macleod, Ewen's mother Vanessa's grandmother in *A Bird in the House*, offers an excellent example of the detached person ("moving away from"). Such a person feels a strong need for superiority and usually looks at those around him with condescension. He or she frequently suppresses emotion and realizes his/her need for superiority in a world essentially of isolation.

Laurence's portrayal of these three elderly women and their families offers a bleak view of human potential and, more especially, of the mother-child relationship. Although Horney indicates quite clearly that an individual can become neurotic because of the neurotic elements of his or her society and culture—for example, the contradictions between competition and brotherly love or between "conspicuous consumption" and "the reality of limited economic resources," she also feels that appropriate parenting (that is parenting which successfully struggles with the neurotic culture) could make a difference. In Laurence's novels, it is obvious that the neurotic

character in the early childhoods of Mrs.Cameron, Grandmother Connor, and Hagar Shipley has made it impossible for them to offer such parenting.

According to Horney, the greatest problem in character development occurs when a child has a "neurotic parent", one for example whose insecurity and vulnerability to the ideals and stresses of a competitive society create within the family itself the very conditions of the society and culture. Most destructive of all is the pattern of treating a child as a narcissistic extension of the parent's idealized self, a situation in which the child is made to feel, usually covertly, that his "right to existence lies solely in living up to the parents expectations, measuring up to their ambitions for him, enhancing their prestige, [or] giving them blind devotion." (*Self Analysis. p.*44)

By examining Hagar Shipley in the light of Karen Horney's work on neurosis, an attempt is made to focus on the neurotic manner in which she interacts, actually conflicts, overtly or covertly with her son, Marvin with whom she is living. It is important, however, to make clear from the beginning that in no way does Horney suggest that conflict in and of itself, whether it is clashes between ourselves and others or within ourselves, is neurotic. Rather, conflict occurs within and between all of us, the nonneurotic and the neurotic; within the neurotic personality, however, the conflict is distinctive and self-destructive.

The symptoms of an impoverished personality appear with great clarity in the children of Laurence's elderly heroines. However, the pretenses which Horney emphasizes are necessary for the neurotic personality—the pretense of love, the pretense of goodness, the pretense of interest and knowledge, the pretense of honesty and fairness, and the pretense of suffering—are most vivid in Laurence's elderly women.

At the opening of *The Stone Angel*, Hagar Shipley is about ninety, an outrageous, difficult woman being cared for by her son Marvin and daughter-in-law, Doris. She has difficulty remembering what happens from one minute to the next and sometimes confuses events of the past with those of the present; she cries easily, screeches at her daughter-in-law with little or no cause, and is churlish or combative much of the time. In addition, she wets the bed and insists upon smoking in bed even though she frequently falls asleep with a burning cigarette; her arthritis makes her clumsy; and she suffers pain under her ribs, which is later diagnosed as cancer. At the time that she is experiencing these humilations of old-age and inflicting them, without gratitude, upon her son and daughter-in-law she is "rampant with memory" that is, she relives, through memory, her entire life. In so doing, she recalls her great pride and her fear of emotion. She reviews the many times she has shown strength and control over others, the times she has refused to allow her emotions to show, and the times she has allowed "proper" appearances rather than genuineness or caring to rule her life. In her last days she realizes how pride has been her "wilderness" and fear her "demon". She has lost the two men she loved most in life through her pride: never did she allow her husband, Bram, to see the love and sexual attraction she felt for him, thereby contributing to his alcholism and death; never did she allow her son John to live his own life until her interference actually led to his death. Hagar realizes in her last hours that she has never really lived, never simply rejoiced. Her life has been all pride and pretense, including many of the pretenses discussed by Horney.

Hagar's son Marvin, with his wife, has devoted the last seventeen years of his life caring for his elderly mother. He has served her in every way he could, cringing from the bickering and recriminations between her and his wife, feeling guilty about the great burden that his wife has to bear from both the physical needs and unkind attitude of his mother. At one point, as he realizes that his wife simply cannot continue to lift his mother when she falls, he is able for a short time to consider placing his mother in a home for the aged; but his "Hopeful desperation" that she will like the place succumbs quickly to his mother's refusal. As a child, Marvin had also tried to serve his mother well, doing his chores ably and hanging around her, fruitlessly hoping for

words of praise or affection. But he has never been important to his mother. Only in her last hours, when Hagar comes to realize something of the emotional desert her life has been, does she see Marvin as a loving, caring, responsible child begging for a blessing from a parent who has always ignored him. With this insight, Hagar blesses him, saying, "you have been good to me, always" (*p.*304) and she deliberately and caringly lies to him by adding that he has been "a better son than John", her favourite son. Thus, Hagar lifts from Marvin his sense of weakness and worthlessness, and he believes her. Who would tell a lie on her deathbed? A son whose impoverished personality with its neurotic dependency has struggled responsibly throughout a lifetime of hard work and little joy, Marvin is one of the luckier children in Laurence: he has had limited joy with his wife, Doris, and their children, Tina and Steven, and he receives his mother's blessing and release when she is ninety and he is in his sixties.

Examining Karen Horney's three basic patterns of neurotic behaviour with reference to the parent-child relationships created by Laurence in three of her works of fiction, is especially appropriate because of the very nature of neurotic trends. As Horney points, out, the neurotic is highly dependent upon other people, whatever form his neurosis may have assumed. He depends upon people for moving toward, moving against, or moving away from. One could almost say that the parent-child relationship offers a particularly revealing (if unfortunate) laboratory for examining the variations of neurotic behaviour since the parent-child relationship, by definition, involves two people bound together by the physical and emotional needs of the younger. Laurence's fiction is also especially appropriate for examining such neurotic patterns because Laurence, in the words of John Moss, "celebrates life while lamenting the limitations placed upon it by personality."(*The Canadian Novel*) Laurence's fiction indicates quite clearly that the neurotic bonds established in childhood remain throughout life, even in a case like Marvin, who left home at seventeen, when Hagar was in her early forties, and lived away from her for thirty years. However, *The Stone Angel* also suggests that when the mother-figure has a strong personality like that of Hagar Shipley, the child's personality appears even more impoverished than that of the parent; and the child is certainly a less interesting fictional character than the parent. Hagar's discovery at the end that life's purpose is to rejoice—is ultimately Horney's definition of the goal of therapy—to create "wholeheartedness: to be without pretense, to be emotionally sincere, to be able to put the whole of oneself into one's feelings, one's work, one's beliefs". (*Our Inner Conflicts p.*242) But since it is the neurotic character—especially the grand dame of them all, Hagar—who holds the attention of readers, we cannot help being grateful for such neuroses, at least in fiction if not in life.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit has taken up the discussion of three different yet interconnected aspects of *The Stone Angel*. The first part has studied in detail the complex but memorable personality of the protagonist Hagar Shipley. While highlighting the peculiar and distinguishing qualities of Hagar's character an effort has been made to establish how her ancestry and upbringing plays a vital role in making her extremely proud and a staunch believer in keeping up appearances. This belief has ruined her chances of enjoying freedom and joy within the framework of familial relationships even. Growth and self-knowledge are the two important aims of all major characters in Laurence's fiction. Hagar also, during her last days in the hospital, is blessed with the knowledge of her limitations and the strengths of others with whom she has interacted. She musters up the courage to view them as they are and admits that her own temperament has been her undoing.

Since Hagar Shipley is an old woman of ninety and she is the protagonist of the novel, the novel is discussed as a typical example of Vollendungsroma – a novel of

'completion' or 'winding up'. Another related aspect of the novel – the theme of self-alienation of the elderly has also been taken up for discussion.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Irascible: susceptible to ire or anger, irritable.

Incontinent: not restraining natural discharges or evacuations.

Restitution: restoration

Amelioration: to make better

Protypical: an original type or model

Truncated: short, maimed

Recapitulate: to go through the stages of one's life history

Template: a mould shaped to the required outline from which workmen execute moulding.

Proliferating: to grow by multiplication of parts.

Vindicated: justified

Therapeutic: healing, curative

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Establish how pride has been the undoing of Hagar Shipley.
2. *The Stone Angel* is Hagar Shipley's progress towards inner freedom. Discuss.
3. What are the distinguishing features of Vollendngsroman? Enumerate them with special reference to *The Stone Angel.*
4. Which type of neurotic personality does Hagar represent? Can you blame her ancestry and upbringing for it? Give reasons.

2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 *THE STONE ANGEL*: A NOVEL OF AWAKENING

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 *The Stone Angel*: A Novel of Awakening
3.3 *The Stone Angel*: The Religious Roots of the Feminine Identity Issue.
3.4 Let Us Sum Up
3.5 Glossary
3.6 Questions
3.7 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is prepared with the purpose of discussing *The Stone Angel* as a novel of awakening and to analyse the novel with a view to establishing a connection between religious concepts and the issues related to female identity.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In *Diving Deep and Surfacing : Women Writers on Spiritual Quest*, Carol Christ describes a common pattern in women's spiritual quests, which takes a distinctive form in the work of women writers. The first stage in the spiritual quest process is what Christ calls an "experience of nothingness," the second stage, is awakening. Awakening often occurs through the third stage, which she terms as "mystical identification", and frequently takes place in a natural setting. The last stage in the process Christ terms as "new naming of self and reality". Tracing this pattern in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* places Hagar Shipley's story in a strong tradition of writing by women: the novel of awakening. Here readers attempt to understand the female protagonists as they attempt to understand themselves.

3.2 *THE STONE ANGEL*: A NOVEL OF AWAKENING

The Stone Angel explores several ideas common to the novel of awakening: the survival of personality, the function of memory, the importance of coming to terms with female sexuality, and the necessity of accepting the past in order to understand the present. Laurence's achievement is that she makes her protagonist's awakening contingent upon her ability to come to terms with her image of the mother and of herself as mother, and that the awakening in *The Stone Angel* evolves in the consciousness of a ninety-year-old woman.

The awakening process that Christ describes begins in an experience of nothingness. According to Christ, women experience nothingness in their own lives, especially in their relationship with men. That is certainly true of Laurence's protagonist Hagar Currie Shipley. Early in *The Stone Angel*, Hagar cries, "Oh, my lost men. No, I will not think of that." (*p.*6) But Hagar does not have as much control over her thoughts as she would like. She tries to come to terms with her failed relationships with the men in her life: her father, her two brothers, her husband, and her two sons.

Christ says that women also experience nothingness in the values that have shaped their lives. Again that is true in Hagar's case. Because her mother dies when Hagar is born, Hagar's life is shaped and dominated by the patriarchal and materialistic values that she inherits from her stern Scottish father Jason Currie. Laurence has admitted that *The Stone Angel* was an attempt to understand her grandparent's generation. Hagar's father represents the best and worst of that generation: an unbending authoritarian, he is afraid to show love, easily angered, bigoted, ambitious, hard-working, dutiful, proud, and strong. From him, Hagar inherits all those attributes, along with the Scottish clan motto that she lives by all her life: "Gainsay who Dare." (*p.*15) From him she also inherits her hatred of even the appearance of weakness. One of her earliest memories is of being beaten by her father and her reaction to the punishment: "I wouldn't let him see me cry, I was so enraged." (*p.*9) She also recalls her father's response: "You take after me.... You've got backbone." (*p.*10) Hagar also inherits her father's brains. Once she overhears her father talking about her: "Smart as a whip, she is, that one." (*p.*14) Hagar does not need to hear the end of the sentence, and neither do her brothers.

In her first mention of her brothers, Hagar says, "My brothers took after our mother." (*p.*7) She describes them as "graceful uninspired boys." (*p.*7) Implicit here is the damaging association between women and weakness that Hagar makes throughout most of her life. The same association is implicit in her opening description of the stone angel which guards her mother's grave: "in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one."(*p.*3) It is this association that damages her relationship with her brothers. When her brother Dan is dying of pneumonia, Matt, her other brother, tries to talk the teenaged Hagar into wearing their mother's shawl to comfort Dan. Hagar refuses. "But all I could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen, the woman Dan was said to resemble so much and from whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play at being her—was beyond me." (p.25) Hagar wants to do what Matt asks but, as she puts it, she is "unable to bend enough." When she rejects her mother's weakeness, she becomes like her stone image. Hagar loses the fullness of her potential self when she cuts herself off from others.

It is this inability to bend that destroys her relationship with her husband, Bram Shipley. Hagar is attached to Bram because of what he represents to her: rebellion against her father's authority and middle class values, and a response to the natural world. It is significant that the first time Hagar sees Bram at a dance she thinks he looks like a bearded Indian, so brown and beaked a face she also "reveled in his fingernails with crescents of ingrown earth that never met a file."(p.45) She is shocked when during their first dance, he presses his groin against her, yet she accepts his request for another dance. It is clear that Hagar is attracted to Bram's earthy sexuality, but it is also clear that the values she inherits from her father and her training in the cult of true womanhood will not allow her to acknowledge that attraction. Her Currie inheritance and finishing-school training cause her to denigrate the very qualities in Bram that she is drawn to. When her father refuses to have anything to do with her marriage to Bram, or with her, Hagar is at first certain that he "would soften and, yield, when he saw how Brampton Shipley prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammer." (*p.*50) Her ideas about love, like her ideas about everything else, are shaped by her alienating background. If she imagined Bram as a rugged Indian when they first met, in the next instant she "imagined him rigged out in a suit of grey, soft as a dove's breast-feathers." (*p.*45) Her romantic conceptions about love prevent her from recognizing her true feelings for her husband: "He had a banner over me for many years. I never thought it love, though, after we wed. Love, I fancied, must consist of words and deeds delicate as lavender sachets, not like the things he did sprawled on the high white bedstead that rattled like a train." (*p.*80) Hagar's attempts to tame Bram are futile and destructive. Their battle of wills hurts him, her, and their relationship. She is more successful at taming her own response to her husband. "It was not so very long after we wed, when first I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet his. He never knew I never let him know. I never spoke aloud, and

I made certain that the trembling was all inner I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maindenhead." (*p.*81)

To show response would be to accept being a woman. Denying her womanliness also means denying her sexuality. Her success at controlling herself is just as destructive as her attempts to control Bram. When she feels tenderness for her husband, as she does when he loses a prized horse, she refuses to express it, seeing such feelings as weak and womanly. The same intolerance of weakness, prevents her from telling Bram of her fears when she finds that she is pregnant. At several points in their relationship, Hagar pulls away when they have chances to pull together. When Bram takes her to the hospital to deliver their son, for example, instead of sharing Bram's excitement, Hagar feels ashamed to be seen with him.

It is concern about what others think, her pride, that causes Hagar to leave Bram, just as defiance of what others think, and her pride, caused her to leave her father and marry Bram. When she leaves him to support herself and her youngest son, John, by becoming a housekeeper for a rich man on the coast, she proves her strength, her independence and her ability to survive. But leaving Bram levies a heavy emotional toll. Hagar's memories of him suggest that not only did she miss him in her bed, but she also missed his recognition and respect of her. Looking back, she thinks "he was the only person close to me who ever thought of me by my name, not daughter, nor sister, nor mother, not even wife, but Hagar, always." (*p.*80) That Bram is the only one who calls her by her name is important. It gives her a sense of self which her lack of a relationship with her mother has denied.

Hagar's unexpressed, unacknowledged love for Bram affects her relationship with her youngest son, John. Despite hints in her narrative that John is very much like his father, Hagar insists on seeing him as a Currie through and through. She even gives him one of her prized possessions, her Currie clan pin. He asserts his allegiance to Bram by trading it for a knife. John's similarity to Bram is clearest in his relationship with Arlene Simmons. He assumes that Arlene is attracted to him for the same reason that Hagar is initially attracted to Bram, because she is not supposed to be. They first get together at a dance, like Bram and Hagar did. John gets drunk, like his father, who drank himself to death, and Arlene brings him home. When Johns learns that Arlene took care of him, he grins, and Hagar describes it as "the same distorted mouth as I'd seen before on someone else." (*p.*199) When Arlene defends John by denying that he is like Bram, Hagar gets angry at the implied criticism of her dead husband. It is clear, except to Hagar, that her preference for the younger son is based on his resemblance to his father.

Just as John resembles the young Bram, Arlene is like the young Hagar. Remembering Arlene taking care of the drunken John, Hagar observes, "She was a very practical girl in some ways." (*p.*198) When Arlene's parents lose their money during the Depression she is proud of her own self-sufficiency when she gets a job. But unlike Hagar, Arlene is able to express her feelings for the man she loves. When Hagar overhears them making love, it is clear to her that Arlene is enjoying herself, and that is when Hagar takes steps to stop them from marrying. Hagar's reaction to John's marriage is similar to her father's reaction to hers. She arranges with Arlene's parents to send Arlene away. When Johns learns of Arlene's departure he gets drunk, drives with Arlene on the railway bridge and kills them both in a self-destructive game with a frieght train. It is not until Hagar goes through her process of awakening that she is able to come to terms with her guilt over her part in John and Arlene's death.

Whereas Hagar was too protective of John, she almost ignores her elder son, Marvin. While she insists that the wild John is a Currie through and through, it is the hard-working Marvin who seems most like Hagar's father. As John tells her, "You always bet on the wrong horse... Marvin was your boy, but you never saw that." (*p.*237) It is clear from Hagar's memories that Marvin would have done anything to win her approval. "He was a serious and plodding little boy, and seemed to take to chores

naturally. But when he'd finished them, he'd hang around the kitchen waiting for approval or at least acknowledgement." (*p.* 112) "But he never wins them from Hagar. The same pattern emerges when he leaves to join the war. Hagar feels a pang of tenderness: "I wanted all at once to hold him tightly, plead with him, against all reason and reality, not to go. But I did not want to embarrass both of us, nor have him think I'd taken leave of my senses." (*p.* 129) Once again, Hagar's pride comes between her and those she loves. As she says, "the moment eluded us both." (*p.* 130) The relationship between Hagar and Marvin doesn't improve when he and his wife, Doris, move in with Hagar to take care of her. Living with an aging and irascible Hagar makes life difficult for all of them, as Hagar herself realizes: "I have lived with Marvin and Doris—or they have lived in my house, whichever way one cares to phrase it—for seventeen years. Seventeen—it weighs like centuries. How have I borne it? How have they?" (*p.* 37) When Hagar's fall and memory lapses convince them that they can no longer care for her, they investigate the possibility of putting her in Silverthreads, a nursing home. Hagar's pride and self-reliance will not permit this and an attempt to stop it leads to her awakening.

As Hagar thinks about her "lost men," it becomes clear that her relationships with them are marked by failure; by her failure to understand those she loves, and by her failure to express her feelings so that they could understand her. Clearly, Hagar experiences the "nothingness" in her relationships with the men in her life that Christ sees in women's novels of awakening, but even more damaging is the nothingness she experiences in her relationships with women, symbolized by the stone angel. *The Stone Angel* opens with a scene that connects the imagery associated with the mother figure and the imagery associated with the natural world. The novel begins with a description of the stone angel which dominates the small prairie town of Manawaka, and the whole novel: "Above the town, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand. I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one, my mother's angel that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty." (*p.* 3)

The stone angel is an emblem of the guilt which Hagar feels for the fact that her birth caused her mother's death, for the weakness that she associates with her mother, and for the power she associates with her father. The mother herself is an emblem and a victim of the colonial system. Yet this image is all Hagar has had for her desire for the mother, her need to be protected, and her pain at her mother's suffering characterize her childhood. Hagar stares at the stone angel's blind eyes, but never sees herself reflected there. Traditional accounts of psychological development argue that the child acquires a sense of self from the nurturing gaze of its mother-figure, grows away from her into an independent being, and goes on to master the world outside, symbolized by the father. The mother figure represents the first external mirror, eventually internalized, into which the girl-child looks to discover her identity. *The Stone Angel* provides a striking version of the absence of a mirroring bond and it's painful effects on the heroine. Hagar's life story is the narrative of a subject's painful inability to belong to a place in any secure way, to belong to a larger community until she can come to terms with her image of the mother and with her own role as a mother.

Hagar seems to suffer from what Adrienne Rich calls matrophobia: "the fear not of one's mother or motherhood but of becoming one's mother... the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted." (*Of Women Born. p.* 235) Easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her. But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull towards her, a dread that if one relaxes one's guard one will identify with her completely. Hagar exhibits the dread that Rich mentions when she refuses to wear her mother's shawl to comfort her dying brother. She also exhibits the debilitating effects of matrophobia that Rich describes in the following terms: "Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become

individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mother's and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery." (*Of Women Born. p.*236)

Clearly, the stone angel represents the mother as martyr and Hagar performs the kind of radical surgery which Rich fears. She fits Rich's description of the motherless woman: "the motherless woman may also react by denying her own vulnerability, denying she has felt any loss or absence of mothering. She may feel uneasy with equals, particularly women." This is certainly true of Hagar, whose fear of the female and the inability to accept her own womanhood lead to decidedly unflattering images of women in the first half of the novel. Doris is an "unwilling hen," (*p.*36) Bram's daughters are like "lumps of unrendered fat", (*p.*56) the old women at Silverthreads are "ewes," (*p.*98) Although Hagar needs the sense of safety which an acknowledged identification with her mother and other women might confer, the death of her mother and her fear of becoming her, bars her from this feeling of unity and dooms her to a sense of fragmentation, which is reflected in her opening description of the angel and its surroundings. In her opening description of the Manawaka cemetery, Laurence sets up several oppositions that will divide Hagar from herself and from those she loves, especially Bram. The clearest opposition is between the foreign peony and the native cowslip. Hagar remembers "the funeral-parlour perfume of the planted peonies, dark crimson and wallpaper pink, the pompous blossoms hanging leadenly too heavy for their light stems, bowed down with the weight of themselves." (*p.*4) This recollection contrasts sharply with her memories of the cowslips.

> "They were tough-rooted, these wild and gaudy flowers, and although they were held back at the cemetery's edge torn out by loving relatives to keep the plots clear and clearly civilized, for a second or two a person walking there could catch the faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things that grew untended and had grown before the portly peonies and the angels with rigid wings, when the prairie bluffs were walked through only by Cree." (*p.*5)

Hagar's disdain for the imported peonies and her respect for the native cowslips suggest her ambivalence about the domestication of the prairie which Kolodny discusses in *The Land Before Her.* This passage could be read as a critique of the pioneer experience, an emblem of one woman's struggle with the conflicting values of domesticity and respect for the natural environment. Several contrasts are suggested in the opening scenes of the novel: death-life, artificial-natural, conscious-unconscious, civilization-nature, repression-passion, present-past, order-disorder, Currie-Shipley. Since all Hagar ever knew was the separation and fragmentation suggested by these binary oppositions, she is condemned to repeat them in all of her relationships. The lack of a bond between mother and daughter results in a painful psychological bondage from which Hagar cannot free herself until her awakening in the western Canadian landscape.

According to Christ, as a result of experiencing nothingness, the female protagonists "question the meaning of their lives, thus opening themselves to the revelation of a deeper source of power and value." (*Diving Deep and Surfacing. p.*13) Hagar's memories can be seen as an attempt to understand her life, and they help prepare her for the transformation she undergoes at Shadow Point. Like her marriage to Bram, Hagar's trip to the abandoned cannery on the edge of the ocean represents her rebellion against authority, against Doris and Marvin and their decision to place her in the Silverthreads nursing home. As Hagar plots her escape to Shadow Point, her defiance is clear: "They are greatly mistaken if they think I will bend meekly and never raise a finger. I have taken matters into my own hands before, and can again, if need be." (*p.*139)

Hagar's trip to Shadow Point is also like her marriage to Bram in that it represents her repressed response to the natural world. At Shadow Point, Hagar gets in touch with external nature and with her own. She goes there because she is drawn to its quiet

beauty: "I like this green blue-ceilinged place, warm and cool with sun and shade where I am not fussed at. Perhaps I have come here not to hide but to seek." (*p.*192-93) What Hagar finds at Shadow Point is her own repressed response to the natural world as opposed to the domestic values that she has used to keep herself in check for so many years. This change is signaled when she replaces her old lady hat with the dead June bugs she finds in the abandoned cannery: "I take off my hat it's hardly suitable for here, anyway, a prim domestic hat sprouting cultivated flowers. Then with considerable care I arrange the Jade and copper pieces in my hair." (*p.*216) Pleased with the effect, Hagar imagines herself "queen of moth-millers, empress of earwigs." (*p.*216) Hagar's coronation is in keeping with her comparison of herself to Keats' Meg Merrilies.

> Old Meg she was a gypsy,
> And lived upon the moors;
> Her bed it was the brown heath turf,
> And her house was out of doors. (*p.*151)

Hagar's house at the cannery, like Meg's is essentially "out of doors". Under these conditions, Hagar's usual concern with protective boundaries is suspended. Like the house, Hagar is open to the natural world, and her openness is signified by her identification with Meg. According to Helen Buss, Meg also represents Hagar's openness to a new view of womanhood: "coming to terms with feminine values is largely accomplished for her through her identification of her womanhood with the figure of Meg Merrilies." Buss points out that Meg represents the "woman outside the civilized order that Hagar needs to touch in herself." Meg is also "brave as Margaret Queen" and "Tall as Amazon" thus representing a womanly strength based on a female tradition rather than a denial of femininity. According to Buss, "Hagar's chart of brave old Meg gives her a vision of female strength that she has previously lacked." (*Mother and Daughter Relationships*...p.17)

Christ argues that Hagar's awakening takes place in a natural setting and it is presaged by a storm. Since the ocean is the "matrix of creation" in literature, it often represents a desire to return to that "pool of darkness" that is associated with women. The ocean represents surrender, release but also rebirth, a cleansing baptismal plunge. This water imagery represents a condition absolutely opposed to the stony paralysis of the angel. While listening to the smoothing sounds of the sea, Hagar does plunge into the depths of her memories with the help of Murray Ferney Lees, an agent for Dependable Life Assurance. Christ notes that in women's spiritual quest literature, the awakening often resembles a conversion experience. There are certainly religious overtones to the scenes between Hagar and Lees. They share a jug of wine and tell each other their confessions. Religion figures prominently in Lees's story, and he tells it in a language reminiscent of an itinerant preacher which is appropriate since he comes from a long line of circuit riders. The confession/sermon which he delivers to Hagar seems tailor-made for her. As Constance Rooke points out, Lees's story is essentially Hagar's "where the chief villains are a concern for appearances and denial of sexuality, and where the catasrophe involves the loss of a son." (A Feminist Reading of *The Stone Angel*".*p.*31)

Laurence emphasizes the importance of the night that Hagar and Lees spend together in the abandoned cannery by making it the nexus of her dual plots. As she listens to Mr. Lees's tragedy in the present, her memories take her to John's death in the past. Since Hagar was so traumatized by seeing all that she loved destroyed, it is no wonder that she is compelled to repeat it. Lees's confession moves her to make her own, but it is not until he responds to it that she realizes that for the first time in her life, she had spoken her feelings out loud. Her reaction is uncharacteristic, "I am not sorry I have talked to him, not sorry at all, and that's remarkable." (*p.*253) They discuss their anger about their senseless losses and then Hagar describes the effect of their revelations: "We sit close together for warmth, both of us, leaning against the boxes. And then we slip into sleep." (*p.*246) When Hagar awakes she feels the effects of spending two nights in the open and Lees's cheap wine. She is sick and confused. In

her confusion she mistakes Lees for her lost son, and tells him that she won't come between John and Arlene. Lees pretends to be John and forgives her. This allows Hagar to forgive herself. At Shadow Point, Hagar comes to terms with the image of the mother on two levels: the image of Meg Merrilies supplants the image of woman as victim which Hagar has carried with her since the death of her mother, and her confession to Lees allows her to confront her own failure as a mother. Her journey to Shadow Point is also a journey into that part of her past, her failure as a mother, that she has been trying to avoid remembering and finally, a journey into acceptance. Her experiences at Shadow Point force Hagar to revise her notion of what being a woman means.

It is through Lees that Hagar achieves the "mystical identification" that Christ cites as a characteristic of women's novels of awakening. The night she spends with him prepares her for what Christ terms "a new naming of self and reality that articulates the new orientation to self and world achieved through the awakening." (*Diving Deep and Surfacing. p.*22) While Hagar does not become a sweet old lady overnight, the effects of her experience with Lees are almost immediately apparent. Her first reaction is anger when she finds that Lees has betrayed her hiding place to Marvin and Doris. When Doris tells her that Lees has saved her life, Hagar is annoyed and amused, "This ridiculous statement makes me laugh, but then, looking into this strange man's eyes, an additional memory returns, something more of what he spoke to me last evening, and I to him, and the statement no longer seems so ridiculous. Impulsively, hardly knowing what I am doing, I reach and touch his wrist." (*p.*253)

Hagar, who always flinches from human contact, touches him because he has touched her. He has saved her life.

Signs of Hagar's awakening are numerous in the last weeks of her life. While symbols of frozen womanhood, especially the stone angel, dominate the early chapters of the novel, the last two chapters feature images of women, both patients and nurses, as nurturer. As Buss points out, "we may measure Hagar's growth in her last days by her changing attitudes towards women, her increasing ability to receive mothering love and offer love in return Hagar begins a process whereby she allows other women to touch her life." (*Mother and Daughter Relationships. p.* 12) One of the most significant signs of her awakening is that Hagar, who has never been able to form attachments with women, becomes part of the women's community in the hospital where she spends her last days. Initially, she complains to Marvin about the noise and lack of privacy in the women's ward, but when he arranges for her to be moved to a semi-private room, she realizes that she will miss the other women, and the dialogues that they carry on in their dreams. The night cries in the women's hospital ward express their shared psychic field. Their mental barriers are permeable and their sleeping conversation incorporates all of the women's psychic lives.

Another sign of her awakening is Hagar's relationship with two young women—Sandra Wong, the teenager who shares her new room, and Doris's daughter, Tina. Hagar, who cannot think of anything that she has done to help someone else, gets out of her own bed, though she is in great pain, to get a bedpan for her young roommate. This scene is small, but important, for Hagar is able to define herself in a new way so that being a woman does not mean becoming her mother, retaining all the old connections with weakness, assuming automatically the outdated passive roles. Hagar's changing view of womanhood is reflected in her identification with her granddaughter. In Buss's view, Hagar's "gentle feelings towards Tina signal a new stage in her life, one that is to bring her closer to the mother and the values represented by that figure." Constance Rooke argues that Hagar's reconciliation with the image of the mother signifies a connection between four generations of women. According to Adrienne Rich, "Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter from women to women across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness." (*Of Women Born. p.*246) Hagar comes to realize that she has been wandering in the wilderness, and her gift of the rings is her attempt to pass on the love, confirmation, and example which she lacked.

The gesture involves not destruction of the "mother" but rather a confrontation with and an incorporation of the matriarchal power to nurture.

The most significant sign of Hagar's growth in the novel comes in its most famous passage, when she faces some difficult truths about herself. "Every good joy I might have held, in my man or child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearances oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth? Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear." (*p.*292)

Throughout the novel Hagar is, in effect, reading her own life; in this passage she realizes that she is the author. Although this passage has received a lot of discussion from Laurence scholars, no one except Christ has noticed Hagar's emphasis on her sense of loss as a woman and a mother and her recognition that this loss is tied to her ability to respond to her natural surroundings and caused by the pride and fear of feminine weakness which she inherited from her father. In speaking "the heart's truth", Hagar achieves both a reconciliation with the feminine and a new sense of her own strength as a woman. By facing the stone angel which she has become, Hagar gets in touch with her life giving forces. Hagar looks Medusa's Stone Angel in the eye. Instead of being turned to stone, she is released into the world of feeling away from the frozen rage which Medusa represents. Facing the truth about herself allows her to speak it. When Marvin ask her how she is, she is set to lie, but instead she tells him, "I am frightened Marvin I am so frightened." (*p.*303) Even more difficult is the lie she tells him that he has been a better son to her than John. Hagar considers her final mothering of Marvin a victory and Buss explains why she is right:

> When we consider the distance she has had to reach out to find the mother and the scant hand-holds her society offered her in her search we may be inclined to agree with her assessment of victory, and conclude that Laurence's achievement has not been in her portrayal of isolation but in her portrayal of the feminine search for relatedness despite all the forces of isolation. (*Mother and Daughter Relationships...p.*30)

When she leaves her room, Hagar overhears Marvin discussing her. It is one of the most moving passages in the novel: "She's a holy terror," (*p.*304) he says. Hagar is a holy terror to the end. In the last scene of the novel, she characteristically refuses to let the nurse help her drink a glass of water and insists on holding it in her own hands, just as she had held her life in her own hands. *The Stone Angel* ends with Hagar triumphantly drinking the water and then the words "*And then*". (*p.*308) As W.H. New points out, there are several ways to read this ending. In a novel shaped by Hagar's memory, "And then" could mean "at that time in the past," a final expression of the past imposing itself on the present. Or "And then" could mean "on the other hand" an expression of an alternative possibility. But I prefer to read "And then" as "next" an expression of continuity. It seems fitting that a novel that begins with death, that has at its center an awakening that places it in a long tradition of writing by women, and that attempts to explore the complex relationship between mothers and daughters, should end countering finality with regeneration. That Hagar's recognition of herself as a woman coincides with her own death is not only the tragedy of restricted choices. It is also her triumphant assumption of the female and of the painful but liberating comprehension of it.

3.3 *THE STONE ANGEL*: THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF THE FEMININE IDENTITY ISSUE

The major contention of many Liberationists including Mary Days, the author of *Beyond God the Father*, is that a major factor in preventing women from achieving a genuine sense of identity has been the "dominant male" philosophy embedded in

Judaeo-Christian Theology. Accordingly women are urged to expose the sexual politics inherent in the Bible and to construct a new "theology" based upon matriarchal cults and upon the real experiences articulated by contemporary liberated women. Evelyn J.Hinz has insightfully explored the connection between religious issues and female identity in *The Stone Angel.* While doing so she has also questioned many of the premises and conclusions of the feminists.

The Stone Angel with its flash back technique is designed to provide the causes of Hager's present loneliness, or gender alienation, and above all her fear of death. Though played out on sociological, psychological, and histo/cultural levels, all of the protagonist's problems are shown to stem from the religious climate in which she has been raised. Thus Laurence, in a seemingly feminist fashion, dramatizes the extent to which religious ideology permeates even secular aspects of human existence.

Hagar could be described as the damaged product of the Judaeo-Christian education that emphasizes mental/male talents. This tradition is made clear through the name – specifically the initials – of her prime mentor, her father, Jason Currie. Similarly, though Hagar's relationship with her father could be studied as a modern version of the Electra Complex, her sense that her husband has committed a sacrilege when he urinates on the front steps of her father's store suggests the religious implications of the episode and so prevents any simple Freudian interpretation of her response.

Or again, if what has prevented Hagar's acceptance of her own feminity has something to do with the biological fact that her mother died in giving her birth and with the culturally upheld ideal of slim, virginal female, these too are shown to have their roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Her religious role models are her mother's monument, an "angel of pure white marble", and the sisterly Madonna of Michelangelo's Pieta – the latter being iconographically evoked when Hagar refuses to hold her dying brother and to drape him and herself in their mother's shawl.

Finally, if Hagar's sexual prudery and inability to articulate her delight in carnal love are symptomatic of the Victorian ethos of her time, Laurence also traces the problem to the spiritual orientation of Christianity. Thus, it is in the context of her recollection of the line "His banner over me was love" (*p.*80) that Hagar in retrospect acknowledges the way in which she – like the commentators who allegorized the erotic Song of Solomon – refused to let her husband sense her sexual response.

Yet to see *The Stone Angel* purely as a *Dalyesque* critique would be to miss Laurence's equal concern with the implications of the decline of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. If Jason Curie's initials suggest the Saviour, for example, his first name also allies him with the questor for the golden fleece. His donations to the church proceed from no religious piety but rather from a desire to broadcast his financial superiority. For him, the importance of the angel tombstone is that it had been bought "at terrible expense" and that of all the angels in the cemetery it was "the first, the largest, and certainly the costliest." (*p.*3) Therefore, if like his classical namesake he sacrifices the female for his own interest, he also represents the materialization of spiritual values.

Similarly, far from it being her father's use of religious authority to sanction his notions of dominance, it is his lack of a sense of hierarchy that bothers Hagar. Recalling how in church the congregation sang the psalm "unto the hills around do I lift up/My longing eyes" to "God the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made," (*p.*16) Hagar continues: "Auntie Doll was always telling us that father was a God-fearing man. I never for a moment believed it, of course. I couldn't imagine Father fearing anyone, God included, especially when he didn't even owe his existence to the Almighty. God might have created heaven and earth and the majority of people, but father was a self-made man, as he himself had told us often enough." (*p.*17)

Conversely, Hagar's real tragedy lies in her "feminist" confusion of spiritual and secular authority figures. Equating God and her father, she stops going to church

because of the way she feels her husband has disgraced her in the father's eyes: "I preferred possible damnation in some comfortably distant future, to any ordeal then of peeking or pitying eyes. But now when time has folded in like a paper fan, I wonder if I shouldn't have kept on going. What if it matters to Him after all, what happens to us." (*p.*90')

Another factor to call into question regarding the feminist position is that what bothers Hagar about Christianity is not its "masculinity" as much as its "effeminacy." Here Laurence seems to be suggesting that the new Testament constitutes a decline from the Old. Hagar's husband is also a Christ figure—like Jesus, he was "born in a barn" and although his "feminine" association with the earth strikes a sympathetic cord in Hagar, it is also his lack of masculine assertiveness that is responsible for the failure in their relationship. This recognition comes to him in his last delirious moments when he muses: "That Hagar—I should have licked the living daylights out of her, may be, and she'd have seen I could. What d'you think? Think I should of?" (*p.*173) Hagar's response in turn is "I could not speak for the salt that filled my throat and for anger" (*p.*173) -not anger at her husband for such a male chauvinist statement, but anger over the realization of how different things might have been if Bram had been a stronger mate.

Furthering her critique of the effeminacy of the New Testament and its degeneracy, moreover, is Laurence's characterization of the surrogate God figure, the minister, who, Hagar's very "religious" (*p.*38) daughter-in-law feels will bring the old woman "comfort" in her last days. Far from evidencing any "Trojan" qualities, the Reverened speaks for prayer and comfort, all in a breath, as though God were a kind of feather bed or spring filled mattresses. Not only is modern Christianity too soft, finally, it is also essentially too materialistic:

> Even if heaven were real, and measured as Revelation says, so many cubits this way and that, how gimcrack a place it would be, crammed with its pavements of gold, its gates of pearl and topaz, like a gigantic chunk of costume jewellery. Saint John of Patmos can keep his sequined heaven, or share it with Mr.Troy, for all I care, and spend eternity in fingering the gems and telling each other gleefully they are worth a fortune. (*p.*120)

Yet what is ultimately most problematic about the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as Laurence sees it, is its egocentricity and the concept of individual uniqueness. To emphasize this point, at the moment of Hagar's greatest sense of loneliness, Laurence has her protagonist ponder the twin issues of identity and the fear of death: "Hard to imagine a world and me not in it. Will everything stop when I do? Stupid old baggage, who do you think you are? Hagar. There's no one like me in this world." (*p.*250)

Accordingly, one of Laurence's major strategies in *The Stone Angel* is to evoke biblical prototypes for Hagar, whereby she disproves her protagonist's claims to uniqueness at the same time that she demonstrates that the Bible is merely the Judaeo-Christian rendition—or "signature—of mythic or eternally recurring experiences. Just as the biblical Hagar was the Egyptian concubine of Abraham, taken by him because his first wife, Sarah was childless, so Laurence's Hagar, who likens herself to "Pharoh's daughter", is the second wife of Bram," whose first wife, Clara, had provided him with no male heirs. Just as a key episode in the Abraham story is Jehovah's command that he sacrifice his son, so Hagar is subjected to a test of faith when she watches Bram one day "cut a slab of waxen honey and hold it out" to their son, who opens his mouth, afraid to do otherwise, and stands stock still and white, while the honeyed butcher knife rams in ... "offering sweetness on a steel that in another season slit pigs' carcasses." (*p.*125)

In turn, with a view to denying chronology – which is the historical equivalent of separateness – Laurence also finds a precedent for Hagar in the succeeding biblical

generation: just as Isaac's wife, Rebecca, helped her son, Jacob, to cheat his brother out of his birthright, so Hagar wants her second son, John to be the true heir of her father's line. Similarly, to demonstrate the universal and therefore non-sex-differentiated nature of archetypal experience, Laurence does not limit Hagar's prototypes to women. Bereft of everything, faced with the seemingly unjust ways of God, constipated Hagar is like "Job in reverse".

Most important of all, however, are the variations that Laurence plays on the story of Jacob and the angel, by which Hagar becomes identified not only with another masculine type but also with the spirit of Jehovah, so Hagar must realize that her identity crisis stems not from secular issues but from religious ones – from "the lack of a proper foundation garment" in a metaphorical sense. On the other hand, she must come to realize that she is the antagonistic force in her relationship with her son John. As he tries to straighten the toppled angel in the graveyard, she compares him to Jacob "wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might. But no." (*p.*179) Rather it is her other son, Marvin, who plays this role, gripping her hand with all his strength, and bargaining, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And I see that I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him." (*p.*304)

In contrast to feminists who argue that the Bible has absolutely nothing to say to women, *The Stone Angel* argues that it is only the Judaeo-Christian "signature" that is problematic. Nor would Laurence appear to agree with those who argue categorically that what women need is a religion which reverses the Judaeo-Christian alignment of pride and self-assertion with sin and conversely of self-sacrifice with virtue. To the exact contrary, when Hagar explicity connects her situation with that of her biblical prototype, it is precisely in terms of hubris and to the extent to which she has internalized the egocentric value system of a monotheistic deity: "Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched." (*p.*292)

"Nothing can take away those years," Hagar concludes, inquiring into the guilt she feels for the love she has withheld, but with Laurence pointing to what Hagar has missed most of all is her essentially Protestant upbringing: namely, rituals of atonement and exorcism. To provide these is Laurence's purpose in having Hagar escape to an old fishy cannery where she encounters a seedy "life assurance" salesman just as Laurence herein recovers the pagan or Dionysian figure of the redeemer and his cults which lie beyond or have degenerated into the more Apollonian Christian signature. Significantly, the episode takes the form of a descent to "Shadow Point", which would seem to imply both that it is not consciousness-raising but lowering that modern women need, and that such lowering needs to have a religious dimension.

Evocative of a shift from logos to eros, Christian to pagan, the episode begins when Hagar removes her hat and adorns herself with June bugs and rowanberries. And it is in this maenadic attire that she is found by Murray Ferney Lees, himself fleeing in scapegoat fashion from two dogs who would "have torn [him] to pieces." (*p.*222) In keeping with his surname, Lees produces a jug of wine and, with Hagar making her offering of soda biscuits, the two enjoy their "Eucharistic Banquet." Lees then tells her of the "nothing meek" lusty-singing form of early Christian evangelicalism he had practiced and of how in this spirit he had met his wife and come to understand the divine ecstasy of sex: "in those days she could have prayed the angels themselves right out of heaven, if she'd been so inclined, and when she lay down on the moss and spread those great white thighs of hers, there wasn't a sweeter place in this entire world." (*p.*227) Unfortunately, like Hagar who responds, "Well, that's a mighty odd combination prayer and that," Lees too feels that "God is love, but please don't mention the two in the same breath." (*p.*228) Their son dies in a housefire while he and his wife are at a church service on the theme of the end of the world. Clearly,

then, according to Laurence, men like Lees and Bram have suffered as much from the other-wordly orientation of Christianity as have women.

Laurence's immediate point, however is that Hagar is "not alone" in her grief, as the Reverened Troy had earlier tried to convince her. Lees' confession leads to Hagar's own therapeutic recollection of the night her son died. In this recollection, Laurence further emphasises the way in which lack of rituals and of such a religious role model as the "Sorrowful Mother" result in Hagar's turning into "stone". Simultaneously, Laurence ironically evokes as classical prototype for her protagonist, namely, Niobe, another "ubsristic" woman who suffered the wrath of Apollo's mother for boasting about her procreative abilities, and who wept for her lost children until her eyes and body became "dry".

Provided with the advantage of confession and, significantly, not conscious of the fact that she has done so, Hagar is able to weep, the purgative aspect of which is also accompanied by her very real fit of vomitting.

The final phase of this revitalized ritual occurs when Hagar, unconsciously acts out her atonement with her son and, with Lees acting as his surrogate, receives his son's forgiveness. As a result, Hagar "could even beg God's pardon this moment, for thinking ill of him some time or other." (*p.*248) Designed to express her gratitude to God, Hagar's comment also suggests an understanding of what the Divine Parent may have felt in sacrificing his Son.

Yet ultimately it is indeed "God the Mother" who comes to Hagar's aid in her last days, not in any individualized or other-wordly form but rather in the collective experience of love and maternity shared by the dying women who make up "the mewling nursery of old ladies," (*p.*264) as Hagar at first sarcastically describes them. Significantly a trio – evocative of the Trinity and the triple aspect of the goddess in pagan mythology – each of these women has something in common with Hagar, which, however they manifest in positive and archetypal forms. Most articulate of the three is Eva Jardine, a skinny old crone of a woman who like Hagar stems from garden mother, and who finds her sustenance in her love for her husband. Second is Mrs.Dobereiner whose foreign tongue isolates her from her kind but who finds consolation in singing hymns about the true "home country" she expects to find after death; to these hymns the other women respond even without understanding the words. Finally there is Mrs.Reilly, like Hagar a ton of a woman but whose obesity makes her a type of "Great Mother" and whose prayers are addressed to the Roman Catholic equivalent of that *primordial* figure.

Reluctant at first to join the group, Hagar finally subconsciously acknowledges her sisterhood and her affiliation with these women's mysteries when she joins the nightly litany:

> Tom. Don't you worry none-
> Mother of God, pray for us now and at the hour of—
> Mein Gott, erlose mich—
> You mind that time, Tom? I mind it so well—
> I am sorry for having offended Thee, because I love—
> Erlose mich von meinen Schmerzen—
> Bram! (*p.*275)

And having found this kind of religious support system, Hagar can also acknowledge the Judaeo-Christian deity without lapsing into the role of a suppliant daughter: "Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father—no. I want no part of that. All I can think is—Bless me or not, Lord, just as you please, for I'll not beg." (*p.*307)

Margaret Laurence is thus profoundly concerned with the relationship between women's identity and religious issues. She can be termed an, "evisionist" or

reformist—a feminist who finds many faults with the Judaeo-Christian tradition but still feels it possible to discover or recover a viable female ideology within that religious framework. *The Stone Angel* does not seem to support many feminist contentions but rather points to dimensions which have largely been ignored: namely, the way in which Judaeo-Christian tradition fosters egocentricity and in turn alienation and loneliness on account of its monotheistic character, the extent to which the decline of religious authority reverberates in the secular spheres, and the extent to which this decline can be traced to the aftermath of Renaissance individualism or to the rationalism of the eighteenth century.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

The Stone Angel is Laurence's best known and most deeply respected novel. It is unique in being a novel of awakening. Carol Christ finds a common pattern in women's spiritual quest. It begins with an experience of "nothingness" and ends with a new naming of self and reality. Christ gives a long list of ideas common to the novel of awakening. These are the survival of personality, the function of memory, the importance of coming to terms with female sexuality and the necessity of accepting the past in order to understand the present. Hagar Shipley's spiritual quest begins with her experience of nothingness in her relationships with her father, her brothers, her husband and her sons. Hagar Shipley's awakening is dependent upon her ability to come to terms with her image of the mother and of herself as mother. The other aspect of the novel discussed in the unit deals with the contention held by liberationists that a major factor preventing women from achieving a genuine sense of identity is the dominant philosophy embedded in Judaeo- Christian Theology. Evelyn J. Hinz has explored the connection between religious issues and female identity in *The Stone Angel*. She argues that the protagonists' problems arise out of the religious climate in which she has been brought up. Hagar's relationship with her father is not simply a modern version of the Electra Complex because of Judaeo-Christian traditions of emphasis on mental/male talents.

3.5 GLOSSARY

Cravat: a kind of neck cloth worn by men

Allegiance: relation or obligation to a sovereign

Individuated: individualised or given individuality

Ambivalence: coexistence in one person of opposing emotional attitudes towards the same object.

Binary: composed of two, two fold

Permeable: worthy of penetration

Iconographically: by way of a portrait

Effeminacy: womanish softness or weakness, indulgence in unmanly pleasures.

Degeneracy: the process of departing from the high qualities of race or kind becoming base.

Egocentricity: self-contredness or regard only for the ego.

Archetypal: based on the original pattern or prototype

Logos: in the Stoic philosophy, the active principle living in and determining the world.

Eros: the Greek love-God.

Hubris: arrogance that invites disaster

Maenadic: in the manner of a female follower of Bacchus.

Primordial: existing from the beginning

Litany: a prayer in which the same thing is repeated several times.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. Hagar is a true example of the mindset of a motherless woman. Do you agree with the statement? Why?
2. The spiritual journey of Hagar is a journey towards acceptance. Discuss.
3. How does Hagar's encounter with Murray Lees help her in getting rid of some of her guilt complexes?
4. The Self-alienation in the case of Hagar is the consequence of her religious backgound. Substantiate this view from the text of *The Stone Angel*.

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4 MAJOR ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL

Structure

4.0 Objectives
4.1 *The Stone Angel*: The Title
4.2 *The Stone Angel*: A Referential Object
4.3 *The Stone Angel*: Different Meanings.
4.4 The Functions of *The Stone Angel*
4.5 The Biblical Angel
4.6 Moving Away from *The Stone Angel*/The theme of Redemption in the Novel.
4.7 Use of Imagery in *The Stone Angel*
4.8 Significance of the Past
4.9 Significance of Manawaka
4.10 Let Us Sum Up
4.11 Glossary
4.12 Questions
4.13 Bibliography

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In the earlier units some distinguished thematic aspects of *The Stone Angel* have been discussed. This unit takes up for analysis and discussion some technical aspects of the novel. First it deals with the title of the novel. With a view to establishing the appropriateness of the title various issues related to the term "stone angel" are discussed. The theme of redemption and the commendable use of imagery in *The Stone Angel* are also taken up. Laurence felt strongly about the significance of past and place in human affairs and in the moulding of human character. Therefore these two aspects of her fictional art are also being discussed in this unit.

4.1 *THE STONE ANGEL* : THE TITLE

For Margaret Laurence there is a lot in a name, in a title. "Titles" she says "are important as they should in some way express the theme of the book in a rather poetic way." (Interview with Michel Fabre, Etudes Canadivennes, Vol.77 (1981) p.11-12) The title which she chose for her first Canadian novel certainly fits her definition. Simone Vauthier in her essay "Images in Stones, Images in Words" comments: "Solid and ethereal, opaque and spiritual, *The Stone Angel* confronts the reader with a challenge that is felt all the more because of the oxymoron quality of the phrase." The critic further argues, "Announcing the new – the text to come—also resonates with the old: Thomas Wolfe's lyrical novel, *Look Homeward Angel*. Hardly have we had time to puzzle about it, however when the narration blocks our flight of imagination by presenting us with a fictional referent for the title. "Above the town, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand...."(*p.*3)

As the opening paragraph describes the monument and the cementery where blind and superlative it used to rise, the reader is taken on a tour of Manawaka's burial ground – and of the novel's major semantic polarities. We are in a sense reassured; so that is what the title refers to – this marble statue "brought from Italy at great expense," (*p.*3) erected in memory of the narrator- protagonists' mother. Nevertheless, the prominence of the statue both in the cemetery and in the narrator's memory and narration, the expansion of its oxymoronic features, as in "she viewed the town with sightless eyes" (*p.*3) - all this points to its being, more than an element of the décor, a nexus of meaning which we are called upon to (re)construct.

4.2 *THE STONE ANGEL* : A REFERENTIAL OBJECT

The stone angel is one of the most important fictional objects in the novel. Three major characters—the protagonist Hagar, her father Jason Currie, her son John Shipley—are involved with the statue which thereby becomes an actant with a narrative function. What they do to it or about it, how they respond to it, what is means to them is of concern for readers as well as critics.

In the narrative chain of the novel the stone angel's appearance recurs throughout. It figures more or less prominently in several episodes and forms what we call a motif. On its first appearance, the statue is the focal point of a lengthy and highly charged description of the Manawaka cemetery which as an introduction to the lost world of the narrators' childhood, casts the long shadow of death over the ensuing narrative. The second occurrence is also descriptive: the narrator remembers that, leaving Manawaka and her husband Bram for good, she had had a last glimpse of the cemetery and the statue. In two other appearances, the stone angel is shown as the object of a series of actions and non-actions. On a drive to the cemetery with John, Hagar discovers that the statue lies "toppled over on her face" (*p.*178) and that it has been painted with lipstick. Towards the end on a parallel visit with her son Marvin, the elderly Hagar observes certain changes in the angel. "The earth had heaved with frost around her, and she stood askew and tiltled. Her mouth was white." (*p.*305) The memory leads the narrator to speculate on the future, in a matter-of fact-way which acquires poignancy from the context: "Someday she'll topple entirely and no one will bother to set her upright again." (*p.*305)

These occurences bring to light a number of things. First, the stone angel has a story: the product of "gouging", "gauging", cynical descendants of Bernini, it has both an aesthetic ancestry in the baroque tradition and a mercantile one in the commercialisation of religious art intended to fulfil "the needs of fledging Pharaohs". Brought into an uncouth land, the harsh environment of the prairie, it experiences decline. Like humans in flesh and blood, the stone angel, too is subject to vicissitudes of time, since winters and the earth have power over this representative of celestial creatures. Thus the angel motif emphasises the parallelism of her fate with that of human beings. From the very beginning the narrator, without telling us all that she knows addresses the statue as an animate being: "She viewed the town with sightless eyes. She was doubly blind." (*p.*3)

Moreover, the statue's story is also the story of some characters' involvement with her. First there is Jason Currie, the Manawaka store-owner, who bought her "in pride to mark (his wife's) bones." (*p.*3) He often tells his daughter that "she had been brought from Italy at a terrible expense and was pure white marble." (*p.*3) Currie's claims about the statue connote more of the man and his values and of the culture in which he lives than they do about the artefact. In contrast with the protagonists' father who had the statue erected, her son, it is intimated, is an iconoclast who defaces her with lipstick and overthrows her, an irreverent prank which bespeaks his need for rebellion—and then has to strive powerfully to restore her, on his mothers' orders. Hagar cannot bear the idea of such profanation and cannot leave the statue or her son alone at this point in her life. In all three cases, the character's willingness to take action, whether to pay or play with, or restore the angel, testifies to the importance of the monument as a sign in the narrated world.

4.3 *THE STONE ANGEL* : DIFFERENT MEANINGS

Each of the characters, of course, invests the statue with different meanings. For Jason Currie, the statue is associated with the dead wife to the memory of whom it has ostensibly been erected. But if it marks her bones, it is also intended to "proclaim his

dynasty, as he fancied, foreover and a day." (*p.*3) As it displays his respect for the departed angel of his hearth, it also declares his own wealth, in a way acceptable to a 'Puritan' society, and his rank as one of Manawaka's foremost citizens. "She was the first, the largest and certainly the costliest." (*p.*3) Although it is supposed to be "harking us all to heaven," (*p.*3) what the grave marker encodes, in fact, is the "place of the living in the world of the living" a symbol of the ultimate otherness. It is also a rich socio-cultural sign.

Hagar, on the other hand, feels much more ambiguously towards the monument. At one point, the narrator affirms "I never could bear that statue" but events do not fully bear out that assertion. To her, the associations of the stone angel are necessarily double. It is linked with the mother who so easily "relinquished her feeble ghost," (*p.*3) whose weakness Hagar openly despises. The stone angel emblematises the meekness of "that woman" whom she has never seen, the "frailty" which has been passed to her son Dan who dies young, and which the child Hagar cannot "help but detest". That is to say that the stone emblem of the mother is a reminder both of values which the narrator rejects and of the mortality against which, at the age of ninety, the narrator still keeps raging. Thus the stone angel, mother, death are inextricably and circularly related.

But "her mother's angel" (the phrase is hers) is also her father's monument, a symbol of his attitude towards his family, the community and life. To the extent that it is a reminder of his power and conventionality as well as of the struggles which she had to go through in order to assert herself, the statue is the repository of negative feelings and meanings. To the extent that it embodies paternal and societal values which she still shares, and to the extent that it is a symbol of Currie superiority, difference and triumph over oblivion, the monument cannot but have a positive dimension in Hagar's mind. When she discovers that it has toppled over, she is not only dismayed, she must set it up again. She scrubs off the vulgar pink of the lipstick herself and rationalises her behaviour to her son, explaining that she does not want the Manawaka people to know that such a "wanton thing" could be done to the Currie monument. She is apprehensive further suspecting that since the Simmons plot is just across the way", her childhood rival Lottie would tell everyone. She appears to be motivated only by her recurring worry about what people will think. And even at this level, her concern with appearances reveals how much she shares her father's attitude and small-town mentality and how she extends to the stone angel the function of representing the family and the family's respectability. Hence, for the reader, the image which she wants to project of herself is bound up with the statue.

What is to her a desecration is to John an amusing prank. "Beside me, John laughed. The old lady's taken quite a header." (*p.*178) He repeatedly suggests that they should leave her lying on her side and painted, which he considers an improvement: "She looks a damn sight better, if you ask me." (*p.*179) Obviously, he has no reverence for the monument and the Currie greatness it represents. His disregard of respectability, on this occasion as on many others, proves him a Shipley rather than a Currie, despite Hagar's insistence to the contrary. Indeed, when he ironically agrees with his mother that to have Lottie spread the news about the angel "would be an everlasting shame, all right," (*p.*180) the antiphrase echoes one which Bram Shipley had made in another context. Simon Vauthier argues that there is perhaps more to John's attitude than unconcern about public opinion and general irreverence. In the cemetery scene, a verbal clue sets up a connection between the stone angel and Hagar, when John personifies the statue as "the old lady." The connection in itself would perhaps go unnoticed if it did not recall, and contrast with, an earlier designation when John called his mother "angel". Mother as angel, angel as old lady, the two namings work together to establish a strong link between the living woman and the statue. In this view, the prank on the one becomes a displaced aggression on the other. Moreover, John's attempts to persuade his prim and proper mother to leave the statue alone can be regarded as hints that Hagar should cast off the burden of respectability. His warning that putting back the stone angel is not really worth the risk, acquires metaphorical overtones: "Don't be surprised if she collapses and I break a bone. That

would be great, to break your back because a bloody marble angel fell on you." (*p.* 178) While John may be aware of the statue as a weight not only of marble but of propriety, one can fully appreciate the symbolic *adumbration* of the character's fate: John is crushed by the burden of his mother's self-centred expectations and fear of life. In this context, the epithet "bloody" does not function simply as an expletive connoting rejection of polite language and social conventions, or the young man's plebeian heritage; it also functions poetically as a qualifier of "marble angel" to form an oxymoron, which points to and enhances the contradiction of the stone angel and of the woman of which it is a symbol.

4.4 THE FUNCTIONS OF *THE STONE ANGEL*

To start with, the stone angel is the first actant mentioned. "Above the town, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand. I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one...."(*p.*3) Its apparition in the text is almost concomitant with the emergence of the narrative voice. More importantly it coincides with the beginning of what proves to be an autobiographical relation, just as in the represented universe it is linked with the actor's birth. From its first description, it is clear that the role of the angel is going to be very important, if not in the action, at least in the construction of the novel's meanings. Because it so conspicuously marks a grave and seemingly operates a disjunction between the living and the dead, the sightless statue may blind us momentarily with the dark dazzle of death. At first one may be aware mostly of its negativity: its lack of sight or knowledge, in particular, is repeatedly indicated, often with words or syntagms which are themselves negative forms ("sightless", "doubly blind", "unendowed with even a pretense of sight", "blank", "without knowing who we were at all"). However, such negative features are counterbalanced by verbs which denote a contrary activity, "she viewed", "harking us all to heaven". We soon apprehend that it must play a structuring role in the expansion of the narrative.

From the very beginning, the stone angel appears as a figure both of disjunction and of conjunction. As an actant in the narrative, it emphasises the separation between the living and the dead, this world and the other, the pride of the survivors and the power of death, the "dutifully cared-for habitations of the dead" and the disorder of nature, on the one hand, and the messiness of life (symbolised here by the disreputable old Mrs Weese and her sick-smelling sheets which foreshadow later conditions in Hagar's life), on the other hand. At the same time, in the textual weave, these dichotomies are overcome by a series of semiotic linkages. Eventually, the statue must be seen as partaking of both the natural and the supernatural.

If, on one level of analysis, one may claim, as Sandra Djwa does, that it is a form without spirit, a monument to purity and propriety, on a semiotic level, it remains associated with things spiritual: the marble form functions as a sign, almost a signal: "harking us all to heaven", it has a message, socially coded, to be sure, yet distinct from the more secular "purpose" it assumes for its buyer. An image of a supernatural being, it also attests to man's cultural efforts to manage death and control nature, thereby bringing together several dimensions of human experience.

Throughout, the blank statue in the Manawaka cemetery is projected against a background of angelic information – concerning the angels of the dictionary, "ministering angels", "angels of mercy" and the like, the angels of the encyclopedia scriptural and theological – angels as lesser breeds of powers and dominations, messengers of God and the divine -, but also literary – the angels of Milton and others. Singularly, the opening description calls to mind the line from *Lycidas*, "Look homeward, angel, and melt with ruth" which Thomas Wolfe used as the title of his first published autobiographical novel. From her hilltop, our angel looks homeward towards the town and what turns out to be the bleak lives of its inhabitants. Though it

certainly does not melt with ruth, the possibility has been sown in the minds of the readers aware either of the Miltonic line or simply of the compassionate qualities ascribed to angels. That is to say, because of the vast intertext in which angels play a part, Margaret Laurence's angel reverberates from the start with imaginary resonances that go far beyond the immediate context.

Another important function the stone angel performs is to magnetise recurring notations and images into semantic and thematic patterns that heighten the unity of the novel, and the angel motif with its inner tensions, in fact, energises the plot. There is a strong growing identification which the text builds up between Hagar and the stone angel. That the stubbornly erect Hagar will somehow be brought low in the narrative is programmed in the angel matrix. A foreshadowing of the ultimate fall into oblivion is even presented through yet a different version of the angel motif. After evoking her nights with Bram and how she "prided [herself] upon keeping [her] pride intact, like some maidenhead" (*p.*81) (an example incidentally, which illustrates the self-generating circularity of pride), Hagar comments on her present loneliness:

> My bed is as cold as winter, and now it seems to me that I am lying as the children used to do, on fields of snow, and they would spread their arms and sweep them down to their sides, and when they rose, there would be the outline of an angel with spread wings. The icy whiteness covers me, drifts over me, and I could drift to sleep in it, like someone caught in a blizzard and freeze. (*p.*81)

The juxtaposition of past and present nights too establishes some relation of cause and effect between the past pride and the present dereliction of the character. Her loneliness is bodied forth in a series of analogies and metaphors which compellingly fuse the horizonal position, the angel figure, sleep, winter and snow into a muted but clear adumbration of death. Here again, angel and death are joined, yet the angel stretched on the ground is a child-made silhouette. Although it is contextualised back into the familiar cluster of death symbolism, this angel appears also as a shadow figure, a sort of double. And thus, beyond the bit of Canadian folklore, we are referred to our angelic intertext —to the idea of the angel as guardian spirit, as the double that stands for the higher part of our nature. This other conception of angels also fleetingly recurs in a humorous remark which Hagar makes about the minister who pays her a visit: "He stares upward at the air, as though birdwatching. Perhaps he hopes for a discarded angel feather to drift down and spur him on." (*p.*119) Even if we take into account that Hagar is making fun of the clumsy young minister, the reference is, if I may say so to the real thing, the heavenly creature which contrasts with the cemetery angels of rigid wings. Furthermore, although synecdochically represented by a feather, the angel is supposed to play his role of spiritual inspiration.

If Hagar's 'fall' is programmed in the controlling image, it also proves a happy fall, for when, stripped of her mask of strength, she confronts her destructiveness and her fear of death, she can experience some sort of belated spiritual regeneration which Margaret Laurence presents very convincingly through Hagar's retreat and decent to Shadow Point, the meeting with another 'liminal', and the confrontation of past ghosts, the apologies she deliriously makes to John, and so on. The outcome of this process is – the (unconscious) realization of angelism and the breaking of the petrification process.

4.5 THE BIBLICAL ANGEL

Finally, in the episode that shows best the regeneration of Hagar, the angel motif in its positive aspect is foregrounded again. Now the reference is to the last meeting between Hagar and the son whom she had not wanted, whom she considered was none of her but who has cared for her in her old age. For once, Hagar, not knowing

what possesses her, tells Marvin that she is frightened. The unusual admission incites Marvin to apologise for having been crabby with her. And the scene develops in this way:

> I stare at him. Then, quite unexpectedly, he reaches for my hand and holds it tightly.
>
> Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and bargaining. I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginnning, and can only release myself by releasing him.
>
> It's in my mind to ask for his pardon, but that's not what he wants from me.
>
> 'You've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always. A better son than John.' (*p.*304)

To Hagar, this is "a lie, yet not a lie" but her belief that it is a lie measures all the better how far she has come from angelism, from the girl who did not want to impersonate her mother. She has been humanised, and now understands the needs of Marvin, to the extent that she gives up the idea of asking him for his pardon and instead tells him what she knows he needs from her. The dying woman seems unaware that her sense of what Marwin is attempting echoes her earlier image of John, as he struggled with the statue in the Manawaka cemetery.

> I wish he [John] could have looked like Jacob then, wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might. But no. He sweated and grunted angrily. His feet slipped and he hit his forehead on a marble ear, and swore. (*p.*179)

In both cases, Hagar, whose imagination has been fed on the Book casts her sons in the same biblical role of Jacob, who incidentally was his mother's favourite. But in the first, the analogy, which reveals that like her father and husband she is not without dynastic hopes, works by contrast to suggest her disappointment. John is no Jacob but a man engaged in an awkward task, who grunts and slips, sweats and swears. Hagar's angelism is frustrated by the incident. Ready as she was to impose biblical symbolism on the scene, she is not prepared to invest it with another meaning. This remains for the reader to seek. In the context, the stone angel appears metonymically and metaphorically linked to Hagar, to the burden of the demands which, angel that she is, she makes on her family and on John in particular. On the other hand, though John, as we have seen, seems to identify symbolically the stone angel with his mother, he is not trying to wrest a blessing from her. Only the overthrow of the angel would be liberating, but, because he is more Shipley than Currie, he complies with the wishes of the phallic mother and restores the phallic statue. Introduced only to be denied, the biblical analogy, however, cannot be fully neutralised. And the absence of the Angel of God who wrestled with Jacob until he could bless him creates a vacuum which the text later partially fills with the return to the Old Testament motif, in the scene with Marvin.

While the first occurrence of the motif displays Hagar's disappointed expectations and reveals her self-deception, the second signals a moment of understanding, consequent upon the recognition of the destructiveness of her pride. This time, Hagar perceives Marvin, her neglected, belittled son, as Jacob – as the heir of her dynasty and of God's promise. The realisation, however, is slightly ambiguous. "Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob," (*p.*304) she says. What with "now" which may be opposed to then, and with "is truly" opposed to "I wish he could have looked like Jacob," (*p.*179) it seems as if Hagar were confusing Marvin with John, mixing up her responses to her two sons into one recognition. This time the son is "gripping with all his strength, and bargaining;" not grunting, not yielding, he is wrestling with the messenger of God. This time, too, Hagar's use of the biblical metaphor implicates

her: "I see I am thus strangely cast." (*p.*304) She again is the angel. But no longer unwittingly, no longer adhering to a false ideal – playing instead a role she had never understood. No longer the stone angel, but the angel of God, and therefore able to release and be released. No longer a destructive victim of angelism but the embodiment of a force that is not hers alone, that has blocked Marvin's past life but can bless/liberate him into his full identity as his mother's son. (Through the encounter with the Angel, the biblical Jacob knows himself as Israel). The angel here is not "antipathetic to life" – Douglas Killam's phrase to define the stone angel. On the contrary, it is life-enhancing. Strikingly, Hagar's recognition of her bond to her son and of her spiritual power comes to her when she has relinquished "angelism".

4.6 MOVING AWAY FROM *THE STONE ANGELS*/THE THEME OF REDEMPTION IN THE NOVEL

In her interview with Michel Fabre and elsewhere, Margaret Laurence has spoken of the sense of redemption in the novel. For Laurence survival does not mean physical survival alone. For her it is the survival of the spirit. She tells Michel Fabre:

> "I mean survival of the spirit with some ability to give and receive love. In what happens to Hagar at the very end of the novel there is to me some sense of redemption. Close to the end of her life she for the first time, really can admit to herself, when she says "Pride is my wilderness",.... that she has been unable to give and receive the kind of love she was capable of."

The Stone Angel certainly builds up a thematics of salvation. True, there is no supernatural intercession, not even a fully realised conversion on the character's part. Presbyterian born and bred as she is, Hagar often refers to God but she cannot believe in his mercy. Her conversations with the minister, or her refusal at the end to appeal to God proves this:

> Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father – no, I want no part of that. All I can think is – Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg. (*p.*307)

Towards the end, she seems to believe in the possibility of an after-life. The prayer quoted above follows immediately upon a meditation on breathing – a condition of human life – and whether there might still be breathing "elsewhere", in an after-life. "If it happened that way, I'd pass out in amazement. Can angels faint?" (*p.*307) This playful speculation hints that Hagar would like to believe in the existence of angels in heaven, of celestial hosts she might join. At any rate, the speculation keeps alive the angel paradigm in the narrative.

Whatever the character's notions, the novel supports the idea that redemption is possible. In this respect, Hagar is the first adumbration of the protagonist in Margaret Laurence's last novel. Of Morag, Margaret Laurence has said that "she comes closer to what might be termed the God within," and the novelist further generalises: "I don't have a traditional religion but I believe that there's a mystery at the core of life." (Interview with Michel Fabre. *p.*16) This is an important clue to her fiction and to *The Stone Angel* in particular. Hagar's regeneration is a coming closer to the God within, a result and a token of the mystery at the core of life. This sense of mystery the writer weaves into the fabric of the narrative largely through the angel imagery. The angel, among other things, is the symbol of that part of our nature which transcends nature but cannot be separated from it, however the practitioners of "angelism" may strive to dissociate the two. As the symbol of the spiritual, the mysterious, the angel is very remote from the conventional figure of purity. Thus we find Murry Lees, the shabby little man who does represent a form of humility and love in the novel, juxtaposing angels and sexuality in his praise of his wife:

> In those days she could have prayed the angels themselves right down from heaven if she'd been so inclined, and when she lay down on the moss and spread those great white thighs of hers, there wasn't a sweeter place in this entire world. (*p.*227)

Murray Lees sees no disparity between the two talents of his wife, one linking her with angels, the other with one of the sons of men, even though a narrow-minded puritan religion has made her ashamed of her second talent.

With this widening of the angel paradigm, we have left the referential stone angel far behind. As Margaret Laurence said to Michel Fabre, the stone angel in the cemetery is something she needed for her introduction. We might add that she needed it for her whole novel. In the same interview, the writer affirms that the stone angel in the novel is not the biblical angel of the myth and while asserting that it "does dominate the book like an imposing symbol" she limits its role to the symbolising of the blindness of pride – an aspect of it which many critics have emphasised.

While it is difficult to claim that the angel in the novel functions as the biblical angel (but which angel is Margaret Laurence referring to, one wonders?), there are direct echoes, of the Bible, and the motif as it invests the text becomes itself invested with more and more meaning. An oxymoronic signifier, 'the stone angel' straddles the animate and the non-animate, the earthly and the heavenly, death and life, and so on. Exploring and exploiting some of these contradictions, the novel gathers them all into a coincidentia oppositorum in which the socially coded statue of the Manawaka world turns into an emblem of the human predicament. Eventually, the stone angel stands for death-in-life and life-in-death. In the last analysis, it may also serve as a self-reflexive symbol of the work itself, a verbal monument which representing life cannot but inscribe death, and inscribing death ultimately asserts life. In this view, the work itself appears as a monument to the writer's past, factual or phantasmatic- a monument which the reader must deface, upset and restore before it can yield a spiritual depth.

4.7 USE OF IMAGERY IN *THE STONE ANGEL*

Images, metaphors and symbols, the privileged tools of literary creation hold true for most fiction, but they are particularly relevant in the case of Laurence's works. A web of intricate images is the technical excellence of *The Stone Angel*. The universality of the theme, and the intricacy of the images, make *The Stone Angel* a novel that readily lends itself to textual analysis along new critical lines. Students are sometimes surprised by questions on Hagar's prairie environment, as if it were irrelevant. But Hager is a Scots- Presbyterian from the Canadian West, and her perceptions grow from these roots. The starkly beautiful Manitoba land becomes the analogue for her conflicts. The Manawaka cemetery for example holds formal peonies and upstart ants; wildflowers encroach on its tenuous order. The theme of pride as an isolating wilderness is caught in the class structured guest list of Manawakan parties. Japanese porch lanterns hung from wooden gingerbread trim, are ironic reminders of the exclusion of Orientals from full participation in Canadian society, an exclusion which is the indirect source of Hagar's West Coast job as housekeeper.

By juxtaposition Laurence establishes subtle parallels between the town's social hegemony (shanties and brick houses), its harsh climate contrasts in prairie environment suggest paradoxes in human nature. These include muddy farmyards awash in urine, skeletal machinery and lilacs, "a seasonal mercy." Chokecherries sting sweetly. The "heedless and compelled" sap of Manitoba maples suggest

Hagar's sexual attraction to Bram, but the pride which makes her conceal her enjoyment of their sexual relation, acts once again, to isolate her.

Prairie weather provides analogues for pride, passion, fear, and for Puritan culture whose flaws and strengths provoke ambivalent feelings in Laurence. Bram's beloved horse Soldier freezes to death in a storm; ironically, his fatal freedom stemmed from Bram's fear of fire. As a girl in town, Hagar feels secure during storms, but on the farm storms mean dangerous isolation. Fire and snow, the refrain in Piquette's Song in *The Diviners*, is the culmination of many scenes in the Manawaka books that anchor these images of human pain and passion in prairie weather and culture.

The sight, feel, smell of the land and the culture run through every paragraph. Hagar's arthritic muscles and veins are like pieces of binder twine in her legs. Twenty-four years of bickering with Bram is a prairie river "scoured away like sandbacks." (*p.*116) The things Hagar sees as she leaves Manawaka, image the death of her relation with Bram: the cemetery; the railway buildings and water tower painted blood-red, black trees, and farms lost and smothered in winter landscape. The pain of this departure and her latent guilt, are suggested through a prairie thunder storm where lightning rends the sky "like an angry claw at the cloak of God." (*p.*161)

The terrible depression of the 1930s, and the drought that compounded its effect in the Canadian West, coincides with Bram's death. Neglected farmhouses and rusty machinery resemble aging bodies; boarded windows are bandaged eyes; warped building "wore a caved-in look like toothless jaws," (*p.*169) sunflowers hang empty as unfilled honeycombs; air and land are bone-dry, deathly. Hard work and laziness now yield the same result: nothing. This blunt fact of prairie life in the thirties takes on symbolic meaning in Hagar's decision to let Bram and her father share one tombstone: "They are only different sides of the same coin, anyway, he and the Curries." (*p.*184) Biblical analogues spring to mind, such as the parable of the worker who begins his labors late in the day, or St.Paul's reminder that salvation is not bought with works.

One form of pride, or bondage involves Canada's native people. Indian and Metis compose Manawaka's social rejects. *The Stone Angel* touches lightly on a theme that looms larger as the Manawaka cycle progresses. Its opening scene evokes the native people through the wild, musky things on the edge of the town's orderly cemetery. Such plants had flourished when Cree "with enigmatic faces and greasy hair" (*p.*5) were the sole inhabitants of the prairie bluffs.

Examples of racial prejudice are unobtrusive, but form a pattern. Matt would have liked to shoot and set trap lines with Jules Tonnerre at Galloping Mountain, but Jason Currie forbids his teenage son to associate with half-breeds. Bram is initially condemned for having been seen with half-breed girls, and continues to joke and drink with Metis after his marriage to Hagar. She is attracted by his dark good looks "I thought he looked a bearded Indian, so brown and beaked a face," (*p.*45) but soon comes to share in local prejudices. Hagar despises herself for being forced to serve the threshers, "a bunch of breeds and ne'er-do-wells and Galicians." (*p.*114) She refuses to believe John when he describes the Tonnerre shak as passably clean. Her humiliation in Currie's General Store when Bram is suspected of buying lemon extract for resale to Indians triggers her decision to leave. When John tells Hagar, later, of the death of Bram's old metis crony, Hagar replies (albeit with a bad conscience) "Good riddance to bad rubbish." (*p.*176)

John's rebellious nature is expressed in part through his friendship with the Tonnerres. As a child, John trades the family crest-pin to Lazarus Tonnerres for a knife, one which Morag inherits in *The Diviners*. As adolescents, John and the Metis boys dare one another to hair-raising escapades. John's death on the railway trestle bridge is the result of a drunken response to a drunken Metis dare. Indirectly, Hagar is partly responsible, having driven John to desperation and drink by plotting to separate him from Arlene. Symbolically, the tragedy suggests that the destinies of

whites and Metis in Canada are conjoined, a theme to be developed at much greater length in *The Diviners*.

Hagar's rebelliousness is expressed in the novel's epigraph "Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light" and the title image. The latter metaphor, like Dylan Thomas's injuction to "rage" against death, catches much of the paradoxical quality of human existence. Hagar's rage, which involves the pride that prevents her from rejoicing, is also her stubborn love of life, her courage, her fighting spirit—qualities lacking in her brothers. The tragic aspect of her experience, her alienation, is thus inseparably united with her admirable fighting spirit. Like the wounded gull in the cannery, Hagar's strength is both her glory and her doom. There is no place for quietism in Laurence's creed.

From a thematic point of view, the five Canadian books (four novels and a collection of short stories) belong to the classic genre of the novel of initiation and self-discovery, implying the protagonists progress from inexperience and innocence to a form of knowledge, which is gradually achieved through a series of trials, affected by inner and external circumstances and chance encounters with other characters, the quest culminating in a revelation or epiphany – the climax of the inner change. In such a perspective, sight as a traditional symbol of intellectual and spiritual awareness stands most naturally as the key element of the pursuit. Chantal Arleltaz argues that "each of Laurence's work set in Canada describes the search for a kind of truth or inner depth, something beyond the immediately visible, through an initiatory travel from blindness to self-awareness. Her five women protagonists are all to some extent victims of outward appearances including their own selves; each of them exemplifies one particular weakness or shortcoming conveyed through visual imagery." The blind stone angel in the *The Stone Angel*, in terms of visual symbolism represents the blindness of Hagar, the protagonists who could not look beyond appearances.

Structurally speaking, the image of the stone angel unifies the novel. The actual angel marks the grave of Hagar's mother who died in giving birth to her stubborn daughter. Purchased to proclaim the Curie dynasty, the angel is doubly blind, carved without eyeballs by cynical stonemasons (Hagar thinks) who accurately gauged "the needs of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land." (*p.*3) Like Jason's church contribution the statue is pride made visible, blind to the needs of others and to the deepest needs of self. As the proud product of an Eastern finishing school, Hagar is "Pharaoh's daughter reluctantly returning to his roof." (*p.*43) As she leaves the town and her husband, Hagar sees the stone angel in the cemetery, sightlessly guarding emptiness and death. Bram's senility fills her with anger at fate, or God, "for giving us eyes but almost never sight." (*p.*173) John, who has his own blindness, wrestles with the angel in the cemetery while Hagar looks on. Later, it stands crookedly over two men's graves. The irascible Hagar, prisoner by flesh and pride, waits "stonily" for poor Mr. Troy. In this paradoxical image the stone half (bondage) is more prominent than the linked suggestions of light, love, freedom, and life.

The novel's structure depends as much upon a web of interlocking images as upon its handling of time through flashbacks. Prominent among these patterns are those of houses and birds, archetypal metaphors for human experience which are as old as language itself. Northrop Frye points to two contrasting worlds of metaphoric organization, one desirable and the other undesirable. He calls these the apocalyptic and the demonic respectively, terms that are useful in analyzing Laurence's image patterns.

The demonic world of bondage, pain and confusion is suggested in *The Stone Angel* by the wilderness/Pharaoh pattern and by maimed and captive birds. The sight of Silverthreads a home for the elderly which Hagar envisages as a prison, sets her heart pulsing against its cage of bones "like a berserk bird." (*p.*95) The gull trapped like Hagar in the old cannery, is wounded by her as it screams their common fear. Horrified Hagar recalls its free soaring. The gull's broken wing reduces it to the level to which age has reduced Hagar, its strength becomes a hazard. Two dogs sound like

merciless wolfish fiends. Hagar's curiosity and fear are answered by the arrival of Murray Lees. The wounded bird that drew the hounds off Murray's trail now appears as scapegoat and sacrificial victim: the demonic parody of Eucharist symbolism in the apocalyptic world.

Chickens serve as a frequent form of demonic bird imagery. The Manawaka dump, which figures much more prominently in *The Diviners*, is the stage here for a grotesque and sickening scene in Hagar's childhood. A load of spoiled eggs has hatched in the summer sun. The feeble, foodless chicks are prisoner by their shells and by each other. Hagar, for reasons she does not understand as a child refuses to help Lottie kill the chicks; at ninety, still puzzled she thinks it was right to refrain, although her reasons are obscure to her.

Worth remembering is the incident when Hagar, en route to Silverthreads thinks of calves struggling to be born. She has always had a fellow feeling for anything struggling into life. We remember it with new force as Hagar and Lottie Simmons sit plotting the separation of their adult children, pretending it is for John and Arlene's good. The two old women attempt to haggle with fate. They agree that Arlene should be sent East until she and John can afford to marry. Hagar and Lottie see the stifling of John and Arlene's relationship as a mercy-killing. At this point, Hagar remembers the bloody chicks, but Lottie has completely repressed the incident.

A concordance would reveal the remarkable frequency of bird patterns. Hagar in hospital, in a restraint, is like a trussed fowl. In the cannery memories swoop like gulls, and the prospect of confronting herself is imaged as a fearsome storm which might sweep bird out to sea and drawn into its depths "as still and cold as black glass." (*p.*235) Discovered by Marvin, Hagar is "an old hawk caught." (*p.*251) Hospitalized, her pain beats its wings against her rib cage, while nearby voices like birds caught inside a building are heard.

Birds with their power of flight, are traditional emblems of freedom and the human spirit. Laurence uses this archetype in her pun which recurs in the Manawaka fiction. The demonic form of the image, the captive bird which in prairie folklore portends death, also recurs. The title story of a *A Bird in the House* concerns the death of Vanessa's father and the young girl's loss of religious faith. But the larger narrative of Vanessa's maturation restores to the bird image its apocalyptic suggestions of spirit and freedom. The latter suggest the partial and hard-won freedom of the young adult. It includes an understanding and acceptance of her people and her culture, an inheritance which proclaims itself in her veins.

Houses and furnishing form another prominent image pattern. They serve as analogues for human bodies and by extension, human lives. Lamps and chairs are memories made visible. Laurence's image patterns reflect her wit. Hagar's first experience of sex provides a comical house metaphor: the bride had not known she has "a room to house such magnitude." (*p.*52) The hen house surrounded by chicken wire sags bunchily "like bloomers without elastic." (*p.*114) The abandoned house at Shadow Point another container for Hagar and her memories has no lock; this mock castle like her aging body affords neither privacy nor defense.

In the final analysis one can say that in the field of literary creative vision, Laurence has played the part of an interpreter, providing the reader's imagination with a certain vision of the world achieved through the use of language, the choice of themes, characters, narrative patterns, and imagery.

4.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PAST

Graham Greene is of the opinion that a writer's "whole career is an effort to illustrate his private world in terms of the great public world we all share." (As quoted by Margaret Laurence in *A Place to Stand On,* Edmonton Ne West Press, 1983, p.15)

Margaret Laurence admits that Graham Green is right in this statement. She believes that for the writer one way of discovering oneself is through the exploration inherent in the writing itself. According to her a great many writers, at all points attempt to understand their background and their past sometimes even a more distant past which they have not personally experienced. This sort of exploration is very clearly seen in the works of contemporary African writers who recreate their peoples' past in novels and plays in order to recover a sense of themselves, an identity and a feeling of value. They have found it necessary in other words to come to terms with their ancestors and their gods in order to be able to accept the past and be at peace with the dead, without being stifled or threatened by that past.

Margaret Laurence realised that much and her own writing had followed the same pattern – "the attempt to assimilate the past, partly in order to be freed from it, partly in order to try to understand myself and perhaps others of my generation, through seeing where we had come from." (*A Place to Stand On p.*15) In *The Stone Angel* Margaret Laurence has approached her own background, her own past through her grandparent's generation the generation of pioneers of Scots-Presbyterian origin, who had been among the first to people the town she calls Manawaka. This was where her own roots began. Other past generations of her father's generation had lived in Scotland, but for her, her people's real past – her own real past – was not connected except distantly with Scotland, indeed this was true for Hagar as well for she was born in Manawaka.

From the point of view of characterization also, the past plays a significant role. Like humans in real life, great fictional personalities are not static; they evolve, accumulate and alter with age. The notions of inheritance and survival, which Laurence says are essential to all her novels, implicate a character in time, binding her to past and future. David J.Jeffery argues that "Laurence's fascination with time is peculiarly Canadian because it reflects our belief in the existence, utility, and necessity of historical meaning. People cannot understand themselves or their plight in isolation; they need the context of larger cultural forces." When Laurence's characters speak in the voice of memory, they register the passing of time in their style, and by speaking, they seek to ease the burden of the past.

The Past is a lingering presence in the narrator's mind. He or she must disentangle a network of temporal pressures from personal and ancestral pasts, from family inheritance, from historical and legendry traditions. Time itself becomes integral to Laurence's themes and techniques. Because the stories are told in retrospect, the very act of recalling enters into the drama, making memory an important structural principle, a means of both recognition and deception, and a power for integrating past and present in a meaningful whole. Memory becomes a creative power that artfully surveys the past.

In *The Stone Angel* it is weaving of the past and the present strands that makes the final fabric of the work. Through an alternating pattern we are given the story of Hagar's life and the account of her last struggle to maintain her independence. When the weaving is done we see her as a character portrayed with deep understanding and sympathy. Alone, by the edge of the sea, she takes refuge from storm and cold in a crumbling cannery. Hagar reviews the darkest moment of her life—the deaths of her drunken husband and her favourite son John. Then into the blackness of her night comes a fool – a vague parallel to Lear's fool – a tippling insurance salesman, Murray F. Lees. Together they fill their bellies with cheap red wine, then tell each other, sad tales of loss and of sorrow. And to Hagar as she listens to Lees and as she receives from him understanding and kindness, comes understanding of self and the realisation that tragedy is the common lot of man.

By reviewing her past, Hagar, the old stone angel receives eyes and sees with terrifying clarity that she herself has been the cause of her blackened years. "Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out

from me and shackled all I touched." (*p.*292) Such profound understanding of oneself is the reward of looking back in Margaret Laurence's fiction.

4.9 THE SIGNIFANCE OF MANAWAKA

Margaret Laurence admits that "much of my writing relates to the kind of prairie town in which I was born and in which I first began to be aware of myself, writing, for me has to be set firmly in some soil, some place, some outer and inner territory which might be described in anthropological terms as "cultural background". She further says, "The name Manawaka is an invented one, but it had been in my mind since I was about seventeen or eighteen, when I first began to think about writing something set in a prairie town. Manawaka is not my home town of Neepawa although it has elements of Neepawa, especially in some of the descriptions of places, such as the cemetry on the Hill or the Wachakwa valley through which ran the small brown river which was the river of my childhood. In almost every way, however, Manawaka is not so much any one prairie town as an amalgam of many prairie towns. Most of all, I like to think, it is simply itself, a town of the mind, my own private world, as Graham Greene says, which one hopes will ultimately relate to the outer world which we all share." (*A Place to Stand On. p.*16-17)

While talking about the influence of a place on one's writing Margaret Laurence argues that a place influences the writing in two ways. "First, the physical presence of the place itself – its geography, its appearance. Second, the people. For me, the second aspect of environment is the most important, although in everything I have written which is not set in Canada, whether or not actually set in Manitoba, somewhere some of my memories of the physical appearance of the prairies come in. I had, as a child and as an adolescent, ambiguous feelings about the prairies. I still have them, although they no longer bothered me. I wanted to go out of the small town and go far away, and yet I felt the protectiveness of that atmosphere, too. I felt the loneliness and the isolation of the land itself and yet I always considered southern Manitoba to be very beautiful, and I still do. I doubt if I will ever live there again, but those poplar bluffs and the blackness of that soil and the way in which the sky is open from one side of the horizon to the other, these are things I will carry inside my skull for as long as I live, with the vividness of recall that only our first home can have for us." (*A Place to Stand On. p.*16)

"Nevertheless, the people were more important than the place. Hagar in *The Stone Angel* was not drawn from life, but she incorporates many of the qualities of my grandparent's generation. Her speech is their speech, and her gods their gods. I think I never recognized until I wrote that novel just how mixed my own feelings were towards that whole generation of pioneers- how difficult they were to live with , how authoritarian, how unbending, how afraid to show love, many of them, and how willing to show anger. And yet, they had inhabited a wildness and made it fruitful. They were in the end great survivers and for that I love and value them." (*A Place to Stand On. p.*17)

About the possibility of an inhibiting or negative fallout of cultural background, Laurence comments, "But I do not believe that this kind of writing needs to be parochial. If Hagar in *The Stone Angel* has any meaning, it is the same as that of an old woman anywhere, having to deal with the reality of dying. On the other hand, she is not an old woman anywhere. She is very much a person who belongs in the same kind of prairie Scot – Presbyterian background as I do, and it was of course, people like Hagar who created that background with all its flaws and strengths." (*A Place to Stand On. p.*17

4.10 LET US SUM UP

Margaret Laurence believed that titles express the theme of the book in a poetic way. The title of *The Stone Angel* points to a nexus of meaning which the reader is called upon to reconstruct. The stone angel is the most important referential object in the novel. Three major characters – the protagonist Hagar, her father Jason Currie, her son John Shipley are involved with the statue. What it means for each one of them and how they respond to it is important for both the readers and the critics. For Jason Currie, the statue displays his respect for his dead wife and proclaims his dynasty. It is a rich socio-cultural sign. Hagar's attitude towards the Stone Angel is ambiguous. It is linked with the mother whose weakness Hagar openly despises. It also embodies, for her, the paternal and societal values which she shares and is a symbol of Currie superiority. When she discovers that it has toppled over she is not only dismayed, she must set it up again. John has no reverence for the statue and the Currie greatness it represents. The stone angel performs a very important role in the construction of the novel's meaning and a structuring role in the expansion of the narrative. In the episode that shows the regeneration of Hagar the angel motif is again in the foreground.

The technical excellence of *The Stone Angel* is largely due to a web of intricate images. Muddy farmyards, skeletal machinery, Manitoba maples, prairie weather, Hagars' arthritic muscles and veins, the remarkable bird imagery and above all the stone angel serve as powerful images that convey the social and psychological implication of events, places and characters. For Margaret Laurence all writing is an exploration with a view to understanding oneself. For understanding oneself one has to understand one's background one's past because then alone can one get rid of the burden of the past and make some progress towards understanding others. Hagar confronts her past, analyses it and then alone she makes her limited entry into a world of joy and peace. Laurence also believes that a place, influences the writer in two ways. First the physical geography, its appearance, and second, the people. In her writing one can find both the influences of what she calls a "cultural background."

4.11 GLOSSARY

Oxymoronic: Combination of contradictory terms so as to form an expressive phrase or epithet.

Semantic: relating to meaning especially of words.

Polarity: State of having two opposite poles: the condition of having properties different or opposite

Paradigm: example

Iconoclast: a breaker of images

Straddle: favourable to both sides

Emblematises: to represent to the mind something different from itself

Adumbration: foreshadowing

Expletive: a word inserted to fill up a sentence or line of verse.

Plebian: a member of a despised social class

Desicration: an act of profanation

Apparition: appearance

Concomitant: he, who or that which accompanies.

Disjunction: the act of separation

Syntagms: a systematic body, system or group.

Silhouette: a shadow outline filled in with black

Synecdochically: by putting part for the whole, or the whole for part.

Metonymically: a trope in which the name of one thing is put for that of another related to it, the effect for the cause

Intercession: act of intercedings or pleading for another.

4.12 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think *The Stone Angel* is an appropriate title? Give reasons.
2. Give in brief the different meanings given to the stone angel by Hagar, Jason Currie and John.
3. What are the various functions the stone angel performs in the novel?
4. Comment upon the nature and significance of bird imagery in *The Stone Angel.*
5. What is the significance of the past for Margaret Laurence. How does Hagar tackle her past and what is the reward she gets?

4.13 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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