Postcolonial Literatures

COURSE CODE: B21EG07DC

Undergraduate Programme
English Language and Literature
Discipline Core Course
Self Learning Material

SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY
The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Semester - VI

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(With Model Question Paper Sets)

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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The undergraduate programme in English Language and Literature has been designed to be on par with the high-quality academic programmes offered at state universities throughout the country. Considerable emphasis has been placed on incorporating the latest trends in the delivery of programmes focused on English Language and Literature. Our aspiration is that this programme will augment your aptitude for comprehending both the language itself and its accompanying literary works. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.

Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.

01-05-2025

Contents

BLOCK - 01

Introduction - Literary Contexts

Unit 1

Colonialism

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, learners will be able to:

- explain the historical evolution and impact of colonialism on literary production
- identify and discuss key themes, such as power, identity, resistance, and hybridity in colonial literature
- analyse literary texts to understand how colonial experiences are represented and contested
- recognise the influence of colonial discourses on both coloniser and colonised narratives
- apply postcolonial theoretical frameworks to deconstruct imperial ideologies in literature

Prerequisite

Colonialism refers to the policy and practice of dominating, subjugating, and exploiting territories and people by imperial powers. During the age of European expansion from the 16th to the mid-20th centuries, colonialism reshaped the political, cultural, and social landscapes of vast regions across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Literary works produced during and after this period reflect the complex encounters between European imperialists and indigenous populations. These texts capture the dynamics of power, cultural imposition, resistance, and the subsequent emergence of hybrid identities. Understanding colonialism in literature requires recognising how writers from both the coloniser and the colonised communities have used language and narrative to justify, challenge, or reinterpret the colonial experience. This background sets the stage for exploring how literature serves as both a product and a critique of the forces of empire.

Key words

Colonialism, Power, Identity crisis, Hybridity, Language, Gender

Discussion

1.1.1 Introduction

Colonialism is one of the most significant historical forces that have shaped the modern world. It refers to the process by which powerful nations extend control over weaker territories, exploiting their resources and imposing their cultural, economic, and political structures. This phenomenon, which dates back to the 15th century with European expansion, has had profound consequences on societies across Asia, Africa, the Americas, and beyond. However, colonialism is not merely a historical event; it is a continuing force that influences present-day politics, economies, and cultural identities.

In literature, colonialism manifests in multiple ways. Colonial powers produced texts that justified their expansion, often portraying their rule as a mission to civilise the so-called "backward" societies. Such works include travel narratives, missionary accounts, administrative records, and literary fiction that reinforced the racial and cultural superiority of the colonisers. On the other hand, resistance to colonialism also found expression in literature. Colonised peoples used literature to challenge imperial narratives, assert their identities, and critique the exploitation and violence they experienced. The study of colonialism in literature is essential for understanding how narratives shape perceptions of power, identity, and culture. By examining both colonial and postcolonial texts, we can explore how literature has been used both to support and resist imperial rule. This unit will provide an in-depth analysis of colonial discourse in literature, the themes of domination and resistance, and the ways in which colonialism continues to influence contemporary literary and cultural production.

The roots of colonialism can be traced back to the Age of Exploration (15th–17th centuries), when European powers such as Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, and the Netherlands sought to expand their territories in search of wealth, land, and trade routes. The discovery of the Americas, the establishment of the transatlantic slave trade, and the colonisation of India and Africa were all part of this process. European colonisers justified their actions by claiming they were bringing civilisation, Christianity, and progress to "uncivilised" lands. The 18th and 19th centuries saw the rise of the British and French empires, which extended their control over vast territories in Africa and Asia. *The British Raj in India* (1858–1947) and *The Scramble for Africa (1880s–1914)* are key examples of how colonial rule was established and maintained through military force, economic exploitation, and cultural domination. During this period, literary works, such as Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden* (1899), reinforced the ideology of imperialism by portraying colonised peoples as passive and in need of European guidance.

However, the 20th century witnessed growing anti-colonial resistance. Nationalist movements in India, Africa, and the Caribbean challenged European rule, leading to the eventual decolonisation of these regions. Writers such as Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*), Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (*Decolonising the Mind*) provided powerful literary responses to the colonial experience, exposing the psychological, cultural, and economic damage inflicted by imperialism.

Colonialism profoundly shaped literature, both in the way colonisers depicted their rule and in the ways the colonised responded to it.

Colonial literature often represented colonised lands as exotic, mysterious, and in need of European governance. These texts frequently featured stereotypes of native people as primitive, irrational, or violent, reinforcing the idea that European intervention was necessary. However, literature was also a site of resistance. Writers from colonised nations began to challenge these representations, offering alternative narratives that centred on their histories, cultures, and struggles. These anti-colonial and postcolonial texts deconstructed colonial ideology and redefined national and cultural identity.

1.1.2 Power and Domination

One of the most fundamental themes in colonial literature is the concept of power, encompassing how it is acquired, justified, exercised, and resisted. Colon- societies. Similarly, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* reflects European superiority while simultaneously critiquing the brutal realities of imperial rule. Colonial governance relied on exploitation, and literary works such as George Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant* expose the psychological and moral conflicts of imperial rule. Orwell, himself a British colonial officer, highlights the coercion involved in maintaining colonial dominance. Postcolonial literature often subverts colonial narratives by presenting the perspective of the colonised. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* disrupts Western portrayals of Africa, emphasising indigenous agency and cultural complexity in response to European domination.

1.1.2.2 Cultural Erasure and Identity Crisis

Colonialism imposed foreign languages, religions, and customs on colonised populations, often leading to the suppression of native traditions and the development of identity crises among colonised individuals. Language was a primary tool of colonial dominance. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonising the Mind*, argues that European languages displaced indigenous ones, alienating people from their cultural heritage. Many postcolonial writers, such as Chinua Achebe and Salman Rushdie, navigate the complexities of writing in the coloniser's language while reclaiming their native identity. Missionary activities in colonised regions led to the decline of indigenous spiritual practices. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe illustrates the cultural disintegration of Igbo society when Christian missionaries introduce European religious beliefs, leading to internal conflicts. W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" describes the fractured identity of colonised individuals who struggle between their native culture and imposed colonial norms. This is evident in works like V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, where the protagonist grapples with his Indian heritage under British rule in Trinidad.

1.1.3 Economic Exploitation and Resource Extraction

Colonial economies were structured to benefit the imperial powers, often at the expense of the local populations. Literature captures the devastating effects of this exploitation. Colonisers extracted raw materials from their colonies while restricting local industries. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o portrays how British economic policies in Kenya impoverished native farmers while benefiting European settlers. Many colonial subjects were forced into exploitative labour systems, as depicted in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, which explores the 19th-century opium trade and indentured labourers transported from India to British plantations. Similarly, Caribbean literature, such as Derek Walcott's poetry, reflects on the lasting scars of slavery. Even after gaining independence, many former colonies remained economically dependent on Western powers. Frantz Fanon's *The*

Wretched of the Earth critiques how neo-colonialism perpetuates economic disparities through global capitalism.

1.1.4 Psychological and Emotional Impact of Colonialism

Colonial rule inflicted profound psychological trauma on both the colonisers and the colonised, affecting personal and collective identities. Colonised individuals often internalised colonial narratives, leading to feelings of cultural inferiority. This is explored in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which reimagines the story of Bertha Mason (from *Jane Eyre*) as a Creole woman trapped between colonial and European identities. Colonial officers also experienced psychological distress, as seen in Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant*, where the narrator feels trapped by the expectations of imperial rule despite recognising its moral failures. Writers like Tsitsi Dangarembga (*Nervous Conditions*) and Arundhati Roy (*The God of Small Things*) explore how colonial legacies continue to shape personal and societal struggles in postcolonial societies.

1.1.5 Resistance and Anti-Colonial Movements

Colonial literature also captures acts of defiance and resistance, both violent and non-violent, against imperial rule. Many postcolonial texts depict anti-colonial uprisings. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* illustrates the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule in Kenya, while Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* explores Nigeria's struggle for independence. Writers, artists, and thinkers played a crucial role in challenging colonial ideologies. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that decolonisation requires not just political independence but also cultural and psychological liberation. Many postcolonial writers seek to restore erased histories. Amitav Ghosh's *The Ibis Trilogy* reconstructs the narratives of Indian and Chinese labourers during British colonialism, providing perspectives often absent from official records.

1.1.6 Hybridity and Postcolonial Identity

Postcolonial societies are characterised by cultural hybridity, the blending of indigenous and colonial influences, often resulting in complex and multi-layered identities. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity describes how colonised subjects navigate multiple cultural influences. This is evident in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, where the protagonist embodies India's postcolonial identity, shaped by both British and Indian traditions. Postcolonial writers often create new literary spaces that merge different cultural traditions, such as Derek Walcott's fusion of Caribbean and European influences in his poetry. Many postcolonial narratives explore displacement and migration. Works like Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* examine how postcolonial subjects navigate identity in Western societies.

1.1.7 Language as a Site of Struggle

Language plays a critical role in both enforcing colonial rule and resisting it. Colonisers often suppressed native languages in favour of English, French, or Portuguese, as seen in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where English education alienates Igbo children from their traditions. Postcolonial writers often incorporate native languages into their works to challenge colonial linguistic dominance. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o abandoned writing in English to promote African languages. Many postcolonial texts blend languages, such as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which mixes English with Hindi, Urdu, and other Indian languages.

1.1.8 Gender and Colonialism

Colonialism often intersected with gender oppression, as women faced dual subjugation, both as colonised subjects and as women in patriarchal societies. European texts often depicted native women as either exotic and sexualised or oppressed and in need of saving. Postcolonial writers challenge these stereotypes, reclaiming female narratives. Female characters in postcolonial literature, such as Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* and Sultana in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*, resist both colonial and patriarchal oppression. Many postcolonial feminist writers, like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Arundhati Roy, explore how race, gender, and class shape postcolonial experiences.

Recap

- Colonialism shaped global history and literature, influencing both colonisers and the colonised
- Literature was used as a tool of imperialism to justify conquest and reinforce racial hierarchies
- Many colonial texts constructed the "Other" as inferior to justify European superiority
- Resistance literature challenged colonial narratives and asserted indigenous identities
- Postcolonial theory helps analyse the enduring effects of colonial discourses
- Cultural hybridity emerged from colonial encounters, creating mixed identities
- Economic exploitation was central to colonial rule and is a key theme in literature
- Writers like Achebe, Fanon, and Rushdie offer counter-narratives to colonial perspectives
- Literature remains a space where the legacies of colonialism are debated and reinterpreted
- Understanding colonialism in literature is essential for grasping modern cultural and political dynamics

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *The White Man's Burden*, a poem that justified colonialism as a civilising mission?
2. Which novel by Chinua Achebe critiques the impact of colonialism on Igbo society?
3. What term did W.E.B. Du Bois use to describe the internal conflict faced by colonised individuals trying to balance their native and imposed cultures?

4. Who wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*, a book that argues for decolonisation and resistance against imperial rule?
5. Which literary work by George Orwell provides a critique of British colonial rule in Burma?
6. In postcolonial theory, what concept introduced by Homi Bhabha refers to the blending of cultural identities due to colonial influence?
7. Point out the most significant economic impact of colonialism on colonised nations?
8. Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys serves as a postcolonial response to which famous novel?
9. Who argued that colonial powers used language as a tool of domination, leading to the alienation of native cultures?
10. Which concept, developed by Edward Said, critiques the way Western literature and scholarship have depicted the East?

Answers

1. Rudyard Kipling
2. *Things Fall Apart*
3. Double consciousness
4. Frantz Fanon
5. *Shooting an Elephant*
6. Hybridity
7. Extraction of resources for the benefit of the colonisers
8. *Jane Eyre*
9. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o
10. Orientalism

Assignments

1. Explain how colonial literature justified imperial rule using specific examples.
2. Discuss the theme of resistance in postcolonial literature.
3. How does literature reflect economic exploitation in colonial contexts?
4. Analyse the concept of hybridity in a colonial or postcolonial text.
5. Compare and contrast the representation of the coloniser and the colonised in literature.

Suggested Reading

1. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004.
2. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind*: The Politics of Language in African Literature. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986.
3. Kipling, Rudyard. *The White Man's Burden*. London: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1899.

Unit 2

Postcolonialism- Themes and Concepts

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- explain the foundational concepts of postcolonial theory and how they relate to literary texts.
- identify and analyse the interplay between dominant and marginalised voices in postcolonial literature.
- critically examine how subaltern identities emerge and resist normative authority.
- discuss the complexities of hybridity and its role in reshaping cultural identities.
- understand the mechanisms of hegemony and mimicry as tools for both control and resistance.
- apply key postcolonial concepts to analyse texts and cultural practices.

Prerequisite

Postcolonial theory emerged as a response to the historical realities of colonialism and its enduring effects on societies, cultures, and literatures worldwide. It interrogates the power dynamics that underpinned imperial rule and continue to influence contemporary cultural narratives. At its core, postcolonial thought critiques the legacy of domination by examining how dominant voices have historically represented the "Other" and marginalised alternative perspectives.

Scholars in this field explore concepts such as hegemony, which explains the pervasive influence of colonial ideologies; hybridity, which captures the mixing of cultures that occurs in postcolonial contexts; and mimicry, a strategy where colonised subjects adopt and adapt the coloniser's culture, often to subvert its authority. At the same time, the notion of subaltern identities those voices outside the realm of power serves as a lens to understand resistance against established norms. This unit provides the theoretical and literary tools necessary to deconstruct these dynamics and appreciate the rich complexities of postcolonial literature and cultural practices.

Key Words

Hybridity, Hegemony, Mimicry, Marginalised, Othering

Discussion

1.2.1 Introduction

Postcolonial theory interrogates the cultural, political, and social legacies left in the wake of colonialism, uncovering how imperial rule continues to shape societies even after decolonisation. It critically examines the ways in which colonial power structured knowledge, institutionalised hierarchies, and imposed Eurocentric ideals upon colonised populations. Through literature, history, and cultural studies, postcolonial discourse seeks to recover silenced perspectives and challenge the dominant narratives that have long shaped global understandings of race, identity, and power. One of the central concerns of postcolonial theory is the role of language and representation in maintaining colonial authority. Colonisers not only imposed political and economic structures but also controlled the means of storytelling and self-definition. Literature, in particular, became a crucial battleground where the coloniser's voice established what was deemed "legitimate" knowledge and cultural expression, often marginalising indigenous histories, oral traditions, and local epistemologies. Colonial discourse constructed the colonised subject as the "Other," portraying them as irrational, backward, and in need of Western intervention. These representations did not end with the withdrawal of colonial administrations but continued to shape global perceptions of formerly colonised societies.

In response, postcolonial writers, theorists, and artists have sought to reclaim their histories and identities, challenging these dominant voices. Marginalised voices, particularly those of the subaltern groups that exist outside of power structures, emerge in literature, art, and cultural practices as forms of resistance. These voices confront colonial ideologies, expose the enduring effects of imperialism, and offer alternative narratives that celebrate indigenous and hybrid identities. The reassertion of these perspectives is central to decolonisation, not just as a political process but as a cultural and intellectual transformation.

The concepts of hybridity, hegemony, and mimicry are central to postcolonial thought, each illustrating the complexities of identity and power in the postcolonial world. Hybridity describes the blending of coloniser and colonised cultures, resulting in new, fluid identities that challenge rigid binaries. While hybridity can be a space of creative transformation, it can also highlight the tensions and contradictions in postcolonial societies. Hegemony, as theorised by Antonio Gramsci and later applied to postcolonial contexts, explains how colonial ideologies persist through cultural dominance rather than direct coercion of power. Even after formal decolonisation, the global economic and political order remains shaped by imperial histories, reinforcing Eurocentric values and structures. Mimicry, a concept developed by Homi Bhabha, describes the way colonised subjects imitate their colonisers in ways that both uphold and undermine colonial authority. Mimicry can be a strategy of survival, but it can also be an act of subversion, revealing the instability of colonial power.

1.2.2 Dominant Voices

Dominant voices in postcolonial discourse refer to the narratives constructed and perpetuated by those in power, primarily the former colonisers. These voices established standards of cultural, intellectual, and political legitimacy, portraying colonised peoples as inferior, exotic, or incapable of self-governance. Such representations justified imperial rule and continued shaping global discourse long after formal colonialism ended. Colonial literature, administrative policies, and educational systems reinforced these ideas, ensuring that the coloniser's perspective remained dominant. For example, figures like Thomas Macaulay advocated for English education in colonies to create a class of individuals who would uphold imperial values, sidelining indigenous languages and knowledge systems.

Even after decolonisation, these voices persist through academic institutions, global economic structures, and media representations. Many postcolonial states inherited colonial legal and educational frameworks, continuing to privilege European models over indigenous traditions. Western media often depicts postcolonial nations through a lens of crisis, emphasising instability and poverty while ignoring historical colonial exploitation. Hollywood films and literature frequently recycle colonial stereotypes, portraying Africa, Asia, and Latin America as chaotic and in need of Western intervention. These dominant voices maintain an unequal global hierarchy, ensuring that the cultural and economic power of the former colonisers remains largely intact.

By analysing dominant voices in postcolonial discourse, one uncovers how power operates through language and representation. While these voices continue to shape knowledge production and global perceptions, resistance through literature, academia, and cultural movements challenges their authority. The struggle for decolonisation is not only political but also intellectual and cultural, requiring an ongoing effort to dismantle colonial legacies and assert marginalised perspectives.

1.2.3 Marginalised Voices

Marginalised voices in postcolonial discourse challenge the narratives imposed by colonial powers, offering alternative perspectives that disrupt dominant ideologies. These voices emerge from the colonised, the oppressed, and the subaltern those who have historically been silenced or misrepresented. Postcolonial literature serves as a powerful medium for these voices to articulate experiences of dispossession, violence, and resistance. By reclaiming their histories and identities, marginalised writers expose the distortions of colonial discourse and assert their cultural agency.

Resistance to the dominant voices comes through postcolonial theory, literature, and activism. Edward Said's *Orientalism* exposes how the West systematically constructed the East as an inferior and mysterious "Other", influencing global politics and cultural production. One of the primary strategies used by marginalised voices is the reworking of language and literary forms to challenge colonial authority. Writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reject the linguistic dominance of European languages, advocating the use of indigenous languages to convey lived realities more authentically. Similarly, oral traditions and folklore are revived in postcolonial literature to preserve cultural memory and counteract colonial erasure. Personal narratives and testimonials also play a crucial role, as seen in the works of figures like Mahasweta Devi, who amplify the struggles of tribal communities and the rural poor. Marginalised voices also challenge stereotypes and reductive portrayals of colonised societies. Colonial literature of-

ten depicted indigenous cultures as primitive, irrational, or violent, justifying their subjugation. In response, postcolonial authors depict the complexities of colonised societies, portraying resistance, adaptation, and survival. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reconstruct national histories from indigenous perspectives, resisting the Eurocentric framing of historical events. These works highlight how colonialism disrupted traditional structures while also showcasing the resilience and adaptability of the colonised.

Beyond literature, marginalised voices extend to activism, art, and cultural movements that seek to reclaim lost narratives and reshape national consciousness. Indigenous movements across the world, from the Māori in New Zealand to the Dalit rights movement in India, use storytelling, performance, and digital media to challenge dominant historical interpretations. Postcolonial feminism, championed by scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, highlights the specific oppression of women in postcolonial societies, complicating universal feminist narratives by emphasising intersections of various social categories like gender, race, class, and sexuality.

By resisting erasure and asserting cultural identity, marginalised voices play a crucial role in decolonisation. Their narratives do not merely counter colonial discourse; they also create new frameworks for understanding history, identity, and belonging. Through literature, activism, and art, they reimagine futures beyond colonial legacies, promoting cultural renewal and political transformation.

1.2.4 Subaltern Identities – Resisting the Norm/Authority

Subaltern identities represent those who exist on the margins of society, often excluded from dominant historical, political and cultural narratives. The term "subaltern", popularised by Antonio Gramsci and later expanded by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, refers to groups that are structurally silenced and denied agency within hegemonic discourses. In postcolonial studies, the subaltern includes colonised subjects, indigenous populations, lower-caste communities, and other marginalised groups whose voices have been suppressed by both colonial and nationalist structures. Their exclusion is not just political but also epistemic, as their ways of knowing and being are often rendered invisible or deemed inferior.

Resisting dominant norms and authority, subaltern groups challenge the structures that have historically silenced them. Literature, oral traditions and alternative historiographies serve as tools of resistance, providing spaces for subaltern voices to be heard. Spivak's seminal essay Can the Subaltern Speak? questions whether the subaltern can truly articulate their experiences within the frameworks imposed by colonial and postcolonial elites. While she argues that their voices are often co-opted or misrepresented, other scholars and writers emphasise the strategies through which subaltern groups reclaim agency. One such strategy is the use of indigenous languages and storytelling traditions to preserve histories and resist epistemic erasure. Dalit literature in India, for example, critiques Brahminical hegemony and foregrounds the lived experiences of caste oppression. Writers like Bama and Omprakash Valmiki expose the systemic inequalities entrenched in Indian society, rejecting the dominant nationalist narratives that overlook caste-based violence. Similarly, in Africa, the literature of writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mariama Bâ resists colonial cultural impositions by highlighting the intersections of race, gender and class in postcolonial struggles.

Subaltern resistance extends beyond literature to political movements and cultural activism. Indigenous groups across the world reclaim land, language and traditions as acts of defiance against colonial legacies. The Zapatista movement in Mexico, for instance, employs indigenous knowledge and community structures to resist state and capitalist oppression. In South Africa, anti-apartheid literature and activism amplified subaltern voices, bringing global attention to racial injustice. Women's movements in postcolonial contexts also challenge patriarchal and colonial structures, asserting gendered subaltern identities that have historically been neglected.

The struggle of subaltern identities is not merely about speaking but about being heard on their own terms. By resisting dominant norms and reasserting their histories, cultures and voices, subaltern groups challenge the authority that has silenced them. Their resistance is an ongoing process of decolonisation, reshaping narratives, reclaiming lost identities and forging new spaces for self-determination.

1.2.5 Hybridity

Hybridity in postcolonial discourse refers to the mixing of cultures, identities, and languages that emerge from colonial encounters. Coined by Homi Bhabha, the concept challenges rigid notions of cultural purity by illustrating how colonial subjects negotiate multiple influences, creating new, fluid identities. Hybridity disrupts the binary opposition between the coloniser and the colonised, revealing how cultural interactions produce spaces of ambivalence and transformation. Rather than viewing colonialism as a one-way imposition of power, hybridity highlights how colonised subjects appropriate, adapt, and reshape colonial influences to create something distinct. Bhabha contends that hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures.

Linguistic hybridity is one of the most evident forms of cultural blending. Many postcolonial societies develop creole languages, pidgins, and mixed linguistic registers that combine indigenous and colonial languages. Writers such as Salman Rushdie and Chinua Achebe employ hybridised language in their works, incorporating indigenous terms, local idioms, and non-standard English to reflect the lived realities of postcolonial subjects. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, on the other hand, resists linguistic hybridity by advocating for writing in indigenous languages, arguing that using the coloniser's language maintains colonial hierarchies. Hybridity also manifests in identity formation. Postcolonial individuals often find themselves negotiating between traditional cultural heritage and the influences of colonial modernity. This duality can create both creative possibilities and deep tensions. Bhabha's idea of the "third space" describes how hybrid identities exist in an in-between space, neither fully belonging to the coloniser's world nor entirely within the pre-colonial past. This can be seen in the works of Caribbean writers like Derek Walcott, who explore the tensions between African, European, and indigenous influences on postcolonial Caribbean identity.

Cultural hybridity extends beyond language and identity to art, music and traditions. Postcolonial societies often synthesise indigenous and Western artistic expressions, creating new genres and forms. Bollywood cinema, for example, blends Indian storytelling traditions with Western cinematic techniques, producing a unique hybridised aesthetic. Similarly, postcolonial architecture integrates colonial-era styles with indigenous designs, reflecting the layered histories of colonised nations. While hybridity can be a site of resistance and creativity, it is also fraught with complexities. It can serve as a form of empowerment, allowing postcolonial subjects to subvert colonial authority, but it can also perpetuate cultural

alienation, as hybrid individuals may struggle with questions of authenticity and belonging. Additionally, some critics argue that hybridity can reinforce neocolonial structures by promoting a diluted form of resistance that assimilates rather than challenges colonial legacies. Despite these tensions, hybridity remains a central concept in postcolonial studies, illustrating how cultures evolve through contact, conflict, and adaptation.

1.2.6 Hegemony

Hegemony, a concept developed by Antonio Gramsci, refers to the dominance of one group over others through cultural and ideological means rather than direct force. In postcolonial studies, hegemony explains how colonial powers maintained control not just through military and political domination but also by shaping cultural values, knowledge systems and beliefs. By establishing their worldview as the "norm," colonisers ensured that their authority was accepted and internalised by the colonised. This process allowed colonial rule to persist even after political independence, as many former colonies continued to operate within the ideological frameworks imposed by imperial powers.

One of the most significant aspects of colonial hegemony was the imposition of Western education. Colonial schools did not just teach subjects but instilled Eurocentric values, presenting European literature, history and philosophy as superior while erasing indigenous knowledge systems. As a result, generations of colonised people were conditioned to view their own cultures as inferior. Hegemony also functioned through religion and media. Missionary activities often sought to replace indigenous spiritual traditions with Christianity, reinforcing the idea that European civilisation was morally and intellectually superior. Similarly, colonial-era newspapers, films and literature promoted stereotypes of the colonised as uncivilised, justifying their subjugation. These narratives did not disappear with independence; they persisted in neocolonial structures, where Western cultural and economic influence remains strong.

Postcolonial resistance to hegemony involves disrupting these dominant narratives and reclaiming indigenous identities. Frantz Fanon emphasised the psychological effects of colonial hegemony, arguing that decolonisation must occur not just politically but also within the minds of the colonised. Literature, art and activism play key roles in challenging colonial ideologies. Writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka reassert African perspectives in history and storytelling, countering the Eurocentric portrayals of Africa as a primitive continent. Similarly, movements like the Négritude movement and indigenous activism reject imposed cultural norms and assert alternative ways of being.

Despite these resistances, hegemony continues to operate in global politics and economics through neocolonialism, where former colonies remain dependent on Western nations. International institutions, corporate influence, and media dominance perpetuate Western ideological control. Understanding hegemony in a postcolonial context allows for a deeper analysis of power structures and the ways in which they are maintained and challenged in a supposedly post-imperial world.

1.2.7 Mimicry

Mimicry, a key concept in postcolonial theory developed by Homi Bhabha, refers to the complex and often ambivalent relationship between coloniser and colonised, where the colonised subject imitates the language, customs, and behaviours of the coloniser. This imitation is not a simple act of assimilation but rather a strategic and unstable practice that both reinforces and undermines colonial authority. The

colonised subject, by mimicking the coloniser, is never fully accepted into the dominant culture but also becomes distanced from their indigenous roots, creating a fractured identity. This simultaneous resemblance and difference destabilise colonial power by exposing its contradictions. One of the primary ways mimicry manifests is through language. In colonial education systems, native subjects were often encouraged to learn and adopt the language of the coloniser. While this linguistic adaptation allowed for participation in colonial administration and global discourse, it also created a cultural gap, where the colonised could never completely "become" the coloniser but were also estranged from their own traditions. This leads to what Bhabha describes as a "partial presence," where the mimic man is almost, but not quite, like the coloniser.

Mimicry also extends to dress, mannerisms, and social behaviours. Colonial subjects who adopted European clothing, etiquette, and education were often caught in an in-between space accepted neither by the colonisers, who saw them as inauthentic, nor by their own people, who viewed them as betraying indigenous culture. This creates a psychological dilemma, where mimicry becomes both a tool of empowerment and a source of alienation.

At its core, mimicry is subversive because it exposes the artificiality of colonial superiority. By imitating the coloniser, the colonised subject reveals that colonial identity itself is constructed and can be replicated. This undermines the idea that the coloniser is inherently superior and exposes colonial authority as performative rather than absolute. The humour and irony of mimicry lie in its ability to turn colonial discourse against itself. Colonial rulers sought to create subjects who were "almost the same but not quite," yet this very process opened the door to resistance and critique.

Mimicry remains relevant in contemporary postcolonial contexts, where cultural and economic globalisation continues to encourage former colonies to adopt Western ideals, behaviours, and consumer practices. The struggle between assimilation and resistance is ongoing, as individuals navigate the tensions of hybrid identities in a world shaped by both colonial history and modern cultural imperialism. By recognising mimicry as both a survival strategy and a site of resistance, postcolonial theory highlights the ways in which power structures remain unstable and open to disruption.

Recap

- Postcolonial theory critiques how dominant voices have historically shaped narratives that justify and maintain colonial rule.
- Marginalised voices emerge as counter-narratives, challenging the stereotypes and exclusions imposed by imperial discourse.
- Dominant voices continue to influence cultural institutions and academic discourse, often reinforcing Western superiority.
- Subaltern identities express resistance through silence, subversion, and strategic mimicry.
- Hybridity describes the blending of indigenous and colonial cultures, resulting in fluid and multifaceted identities.

- Hegemony explains how colonial ideologies become normalised, shaping the beliefs and practices of societies.
- Mimicry, as a form of cultural imitation, exposes the contradictions within colonial power structures.
- These themes collectively illustrate the ongoing process of decolonisation and the rearticulation of cultural identities in a postcolonial world.

Objective Questions

1. Which term refers to the dominant narratives constructed by former colonisers?
2. What concept describes the blending of indigenous and colonial cultures?
3. Who is often excluded from mainstream discourse and is represented by the term "subaltern"?
4. Which concept explains the subtle control exerted by colonial ideology through cultural consent?
5. What term is used to describe the strategy where colonised subjects adopt the coloniser's culture in an ironic manner?
6. Which scholar is known for discussing the idea of mimicry as a form of subversion in colonial contexts?
7. What does postcolonial theory primarily critique in relation to literature?
8. In postcolonial literature, which voices serve as counter-narratives to imperial domination?
9. What effect does the concept of hybridity have on cultural identities in postcolonial societies?
10. How does the concept of hegemony function in the context of colonial and postcolonial studies?

Answers

1. Dominant voices.
2. Hybridity.
3. Marginalised or oppressed groups.
4. Hegemony.
5. Mimicry.
6. Homi Bhabha.

7. The legacy of colonial power and its impact on cultural and literary narratives.
8. Marginalised voices.
9. It creates fluid, multi-layered identities that challenge binary oppositions.
10. It describes how dominant cultural narratives are maintained through both force and consent.

Assignments

1. Critically analyse how dominant voices in colonial literature establish cultural superiority and justify imperial rule. Use examples from at least two literary texts.
2. Explore the role of marginalised voices in postcolonial literature. How do these narratives contest and transform traditional representations of the colonised?
3. Discuss the concept of the subaltern in postcolonial theory. How do subaltern identities resist normative authority in literature?
4. Examine the concept of hybridity in a specific postcolonial text. How does the blending of cultures challenge traditional notions of identity?
5. Analyse the use of mimicry in postcolonial literature. In what ways does mimicry serve as both a tool for assimilation and a method of subversion?

Suggested Reading

1. Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.
2. Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
3. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
4. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*.

BLOCK - 02

Essays

Unit 1

Bill Ashcroft - "Introduction" from *The Empire Writes Back*

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- analyse the impact of colonial history on language, culture, and identity formation in postcolonial literatures
- evaluate key postcolonial theorists' contributions in the context of literary resistance and empowerment
- critically engage with the concepts of linguistic appropriation and hybridity in postcolonial texts
- discuss the evolution of postcolonial literature and its relationship to English studies and colonial power structures

Prerequisites

In the world of postcolonial studies, few texts stand as monumental as *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. This work discusses the ongoing effects of colonialism on literature, culture, and identity. Through a critique of imperial power structures, the text asserts that postcolonial literatures are not simply derivative offshoots of British traditions but are, in fact, powerful independent voices forged in the crucible of resistance and transformation.

Ashcroft and his co-authors challenge the Eurocentric frameworks that have long dominated literary studies, asserting that postcolonial writings, while often written in the language of the coloniser, represent a reimagining of that language. The exploration of concepts like hegemony and displacement reveal how the legacy of colonialism persists, not only in political structures but also in cultural and linguistic hierarchies. In the postcolonial world, literature becomes more than an art form; it becomes a means of asserting identity, challenging historical narratives, and reclaiming spaces of belonging. The study of these literatures, therefore, is not merely an academic exercise; it is a call to understand the world through the eyes of those whose histories have been shaped by colonialism.

This work sets the stage for further exploration into how postcolonial writers use their voices to resist oppression, affirm their identities, and confront the enduring forces of imperialism. In understanding postcolonial literature, we gain insight into the complexities of culture, language, and power in a world still marked by the echoes of colonial rule.

We focus only on the first section, the "Introduction" to *The Empire Writes Back*. This section defines key concepts, outlines the historical development of postcolonial literatures, and discusses their relationship with English studies and colonial power structures.

Key words

Postcolonialism, Language, Power, Abrogation, Appropriation, Hybridity, Canon, Displacement.

2.1.1 Discussion

Bill Ashcroft is a renowned scholar in the field of postcolonial studies, best known for his work on how colonial histories influence language, literature, and culture. He, along with his co-authors Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, is one of the founders of postcolonial theory. Ashcroft's scholarship has focused on the dynamics of empire, colonial power, and the global transformations of cultures, identities, and literature after colonialism.

In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, Ashcroft, along with Griffiths and Tiffin, explores how postcolonial writers, particularly those from formerly colonised countries, navigate the complexities of writing in the language of the coloniser. Published in 1989, *The Empire Writes Back* was the first major theoretical work to examine post colonial literatures as a unified field of study. The book challenged the traditional Eurocentric approach to literature by arguing that post colonial writings are not simply extensions of British literature but distinct, independent literatures that engage with the experience of colonialism and its aftermath.

One of its most influential ideas is the distinction between English and englishes, showing how language has been transformed in different post colonial contexts. The book also critiques how the British literary canon has historically marginalised post colonial voices, reinforcing cultural hegemony. By bringing together discussions on language, identity, cultural resistance, and literary theory, *The Empire Writes Back* laid the foundation for post colonial studies and remains a key text in the field.

2.1.2 Summary

2.1.2.1 What Are Post Colonial Literatures?

The introduction to *The Empire Writes Back* sets the stage for an exploration of how colonialism has shaped the lives, perspectives, and literatures of people worldwide. The text emphasises that more than three-quarters of the global population today have been impacted by the experience of colonialism, and this influence is not just political or economic but deeply cultural and perceptual. While colonialism's effects on politics and economics are obvious, its role in shaping cultural frame-

works and perceptions is less immediately visible but no less profound.

The introduction then sheds light on what constitutes *post colonial literature*. The book focuses primarily on works by people who were once colonised by Britain, though much of the analysis extends to those colonised by other European powers like France, Portugal, and Spain. The term "post colonial" might seem to only describe the period following a country's independence, but the authors argue that the term should encompass the entire historical period from the onset of colonisation to the present. This approach highlights the lasting influence of colonialism on culture, even after formal independence.

The authors suggest that post colonial literature represents not only a reaction to imperialism but also an ongoing discourse that confronts the legacy of European domination. Such literatures from countries like India, Canada, the Caribbean, Australia, and the U.S. all emerge from the context of colonialism. Even though the U.S. may not typically be categorised as post colonial due to its global power today, its historical relationship with colonial powers and its ongoing neo-imperial role make it relevant to post colonial discourse.

The primary common thread among these literatures is that they emerged from the tension between colonisers and the colonised, and they assert cultural and intellectual independence by foregrounding their differences from imperial assumptions and ideologies. This distinctive focus on difference and resistance to imperial influence is what characterises post colonial literature.

2.1.2.2 Post colonial Literatures and English Studies

The study of English literature has always been deeply intertwined with political and cultural forces, particularly nationalism. The establishment of English as an academic discipline in nineteenth-century Britain was a strategic effort to replace the Classics as the core of humanistic studies, a move that was confirmed with the inclusion of English in the syllabi of prestigious institutions like Oxford and Cambridge. English was linked to the Classical methodology, focusing on philology, historical analysis, and a search for unified meanings in texts. This development occurred alongside the rise of imperialism, and the institutionalisation of English studies played a significant role in supporting British colonialism.

Gauri Viswanathan argues that English literary study, especially in colonial contexts like India, was instrumental in maintaining colonial control. British administrators, alongside missionaries, used English literature as a tool to assert dominance over colonised peoples by presenting it as part of a liberal educational framework. English literature became central not only to the educational system but to the larger ideological project of empire-building, reinforcing notions of civilisation and humanity, while positioning colonised peoples as "savage" and "primitive."

The study of English, as a product of the empire, established a "privileging norm" in which the English literary canon was positioned as central to cultural development. In this process, peripheral cultures and literatures were marginalised. However, post colonial societies, as they sought to assert their independence, began challenging this dominant ideology. One way this was done was by separating the study of English literature from the study of language, recognising that the connection between English and colonialism needed to be questioned. Writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o argued for the abolition of the English department in African universities, while critics such as John Docker ad-

dressed similar issues in post colonial settler colonies like the West Indies and India.

Despite efforts to decolonise education, the influence of the English literary tradition remains strong in post colonial contexts. The canonical status of English literature and the cultural and ideological values it represents have proven resistant to change. However, the development of post colonial literatures challenges many of the assumptions that have underpinned the study of English, forcing a re-evaluation of its role and significance in the post colonial world.

2.1.2.3 Development Of Post Colonial Literatures

Post colonial literatures evolved in stages, corresponding to both national or regional identity development and the desire to assert cultural and ideological differences from the imperial centre. During the imperial period, much of the literature produced in colonies was written by a literate elite who were often aligned with the colonising power. These early texts, produced by settlers, travellers, and colonial administrators, could not represent indigenous cultures nor contribute to a distinct post colonial identity. While they provided detailed descriptions of landscapes, customs, and language, they ultimately reinforced the dominance of the coloniser and privileged the "metropolitan" perspective over the "native" or "provincial" one. Even literary works like those of Rudyard Kipling, which depicted colonial life, reinforced the imperial view, often by invoking the absent "home" country to legitimise the colonial experience.

The second stage in the development of post colonial literature involved works produced under imperial influence by native or marginalised writers. These authors, educated in the language and culture of the coloniser, were part of a privileged class that allowed them access to literary production. Writers such as Indian upper-class authors or African "missionary" writers, like Thomas Mofolo, produced works in English or the language of the coloniser. While these works addressed themes such as colonial brutality or the loss of indigenous cultures, they were constrained by the colonial system. The imperial powers controlled both the discourse and the institutional structures for producing literature, preventing these works from fully subverting or challenging imperial ideologies.

In these early stages of post colonial literature, the potential for subversion was limited by both the available discourse and the material conditions under which the literature was produced. The true development of independent post colonial literatures depended on the rejection of these colonial constraints and the appropriation of language and writing for new, distinctive purposes. This process of appropriation marked a key moment in the emergence of modern post colonial literatures, as writers began to use the coloniser's language to express indigenous identities and assert cultural independence.

2.1.2.4 Hegemony

The continued engagement of post colonial societies with the imperial experience is significant, despite their political independence. The question arises as to why post colonial societies should address coloniality once imperial structures have been dismantled. Although Britain and other colonial powers have lost their dominance in global politics and economics, their cultural influence persists. British literary traditions and Received Standard English (RS-English), which represents the English of southeast England as the universal norm, continue to shape cultural production in many post colonial societies. This cultural hegemony is reinforced by canonical assumptions in literature and the tendency to treat post colonial literatures as marginal extensions of English literature.

As post colonial literature has gained recognition, there has been an effort to incorporate it into the British literary canon using Eurocentric standards, thus relegating these works to secondary positions. This situation mirrors that of feminist writing, which has historically been marginalised and subsequently incorporated into mainstream literary discussions.

Language plays a crucial role in imperial oppression. The imperial education system imposed a "standard" version of the metropolitan language, marginalising other linguistic variants as inferior. Through language, imperial powers perpetuated their hierarchical control over colonies, dictating what constituted "truth" and "reality." In post colonial societies, the process of asserting a distinct voice often involves rejecting the dominant language of the empire. The discussion of post colonial literature is, therefore, also a discussion of how the language itself has been wrested from European dominance.

The text distinguishes between "English" as the standard version of the language (associated with the imperial centre) and "english," which refers to the various regional forms of English that have emerged in post colonial societies. These varieties of English, while still linked to their imperial roots, have been transformed and subverted to reflect local cultures and identities. This distinction highlights the political and cultural dynamics between the imperial "centre" and the "peripheries," where English has been adapted into innovative and diverse literary forms. The tension between the authoritative claim of "English" as a standard code and the regional varieties of "english" has fuelled some of the most exciting modern literatures.

2.1.2.5 Place and Displacement

A central theme in post colonial literature is the concern with *place* and *displacement*, which is closely tied to the post colonial crisis of identity. This concern arises from the need to establish a meaningful relationship between the self and the place where one resides. Colonisation through migration, enslavement, indentured labour, or voluntary removal often disrupts this connection, leaving individuals with a fractured sense of identity. Even beyond the historical and cultural diversity of post colonial societies, the themes of *place* and *displacement*, and the search for *authenticity* and identity, are consistent across the literatures of the post colonial world. Whether they are Canadian settlers, Australian convicts, Caribbean slaves, or African colonised peoples, these groups share an alienation rooted in the tension between their imposed identities and their actual lived experiences in a foreign or altered land.

The sense of alienation in post colonial societies often arises not only from physical displacement but also from linguistic dislocation. The language of the colonisers, particularly English, becomes an inadequate tool for expressing the complex realities of life in the colony. Writers from colonised regions like Indian author Raja Rao or Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe had to adapt the English language to their own contexts, making it "bear the burden" of their experiences. This gap between place and language leads to alienation, whether the writer is dealing with the oppression of language or simply the inadequacy of the colonial language to describe the local environment and culture.

For example, early Canadian poet Joseph Howe struggled to use English to describe the Canadian landscape, showing how even native speakers of English felt the inadequacy of the language to express the new conditions and cultural realities they faced. The need to overcome the limitations of imperial English is not just an intellectual pursuit but a practical necessity for those whose lived experienc-

es do not match the English canon or cultural assumptions. The development of *english* (a variety of English suited to local contexts) is seen as a way to overcome these colonial constraints and better express post colonial realities.

2.1.2.6 Post Colonial Theory

Post colonial literary theory emerged as a response to the limitations of European theories in addressing the complexities of post colonial writing. European theories, rooted in specific cultural traditions, often assumed a universal applicability, which failed to account for the diverse cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of post colonial societies. Post colonial literature and theory have thus developed to challenge these assumptions and to explore the distinct cultural practices, genres, and epistemologies that characterise post colonial writing. This process involves both critiquing the monocentric and Eurocentric foundations of colonialism and seeking new ways to describe and understand the various cultural traditions within post colonial societies.

The emergence of post colonial theory can be understood as a reaction to the dominant colonial mindset that treated European culture as the centre and relegated all other cultures to the margins. This intellectual and cultural hegemony was justified through European philosophical and representational systems. However, the very act of relegating the colonised world to the periphery had a destabilising effect on the empire itself. As post colonial societies moved beyond the constraints of monocentric thinking, they embraced a more pluralistic and decentred worldview, one that recognised the multiplicity of experiences, languages, and identities that colonialism had previously tried to suppress.

As a result, post colonial theory has developed in a way that both critiques and subverts the assumptions of European thought, drawing on the creative energy found in marginalised and previously silenced voices. The task of post colonial theory is thus twofold: describe the nature of post colonial texts and identify the theories that have emerged to account for them. These theories challenge conventional European literary and linguistic practices and attempt to form new discourses that can properly represent the post colonial condition.

The development of post colonial theory involves the creation of indigenous intellectual frameworks, as well as a re-examination of the relationship between language, literature, and colonial power. In doing so, post colonial theory engages with broader questions of language, literary theory, and social-political analysis, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the legacy of colonialism and its ongoing impact.

2.1.3 Analysis

The introduction to *The Empire Writes Back* explores the far-reaching impact of colonialism, arguing that more than three-quarters of the world's population has had their lives shaped by it, not only politically and economically but culturally and perceptually as well. While the political and economic effects of colonialism are well-known, the text emphasises that its influence on how people perceive the world and themselves often goes unnoticed. Literature, however, provides one of the most significant avenues through which these newly formed perceptions are expressed, encapsulating the day-to-day realities of the colonised and encoding them in powerful ways. The arts—literature, music, painting, and dance—have all played an essential role in shaping and expressing the lived experiences of colonised peoples.

The book focuses on post colonial literature, particularly works created by those colonised by Britain, although it acknowledges that the impact of colonialism extends across all

nations colonised by European powers, including France, Portugal, and Spain. The introduction makes a case for broadening the definition of "post colonial" literature. Rather than limiting it to the period after a country's independence, the authors argue that it should encompass the entire experience of colonisation, from the moment of European imperial expansion to the present. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the legacies left by colonialism, which continue to shape culture, thought, and identity, even after formal political independence.

The text emphasises the common thread running through all post colonial literatures: the tension between colonisers and the colonised. Whether in Africa, the Caribbean, India, or even the United States, these literatures were born from the struggle to assert cultural and intellectual independence in the face of colonial dominance. What distinguishes post colonial literature is its resistance to imperial assumptions and its emphasis on cultural difference, often confronting or subverting the values imposed by colonial powers. It is through this resistance and the assertion of alternative identities that these literatures emerge, continually foregrounding their differences from the imperial centre.

The introduction also includes an interesting observation about the U.S., traditionally not considered part of the post colonial world, given its current status as a global power. However, the authors argue that the U.S., despite its contemporary role in global imperialism, should be included in post colonial discourse due to its colonial origins and its ongoing imperial-like influence in the world. This brings a complex perspective to the idea of empire, suggesting that post colonial literature and its concerns are relevant in understanding the continuing global dynamics of power and resistance.

Overall, the introduction sets the tone for a broad and inclusive examination of post colonial literature, emphasising its shared origins in the colonial experience and its role in challenging imperial structures. The idea that post colonial literature is not limited to the moment after independence but extends across time to encompass the ongoing effects of colonisation provides a rich framework for understanding how these literatures continue to shape and reflect the world today.

The relationship between the study of English and British imperialism is central to understanding the dynamics of post colonial literature and education. The introduction of English as an academic discipline in Britain wasn't just an intellectual shift; it was inherently political. By positioning English literature as a core part of humanistic studies, it served not only as a cultural tool but also as a means of promoting British values and maintaining control over colonised peoples. The focus on philology, historical analysis, and unified meanings reinforced the idea that English was the pinnacle of civilisation and culture. This framework systematically marginalised the cultural and literary traditions of the colonised, reinforcing the "civilising mission" of empire.

Viswanathan's argument that English literary study was used as a tool to maintain colonial power is significant because it shifts the focus of colonial education from mere political control to intellectual and cultural hegemony. The use of English literature as an instrument for "reforming" the colonised subjects (by presenting English values as universal) is an insidious form of domination. It created a space where the colonised were encouraged to aspire to Englishness, often at the cost of their own cultural identity. This mimicry, attempting to be "more English than the English," is a recurring theme in post colonial literature, as

seen in the works of writers like Henry James and T.S. Eliot, who wrestled with their own cultural hybridity.

The text also discusses how post colonial nations began to challenge this system. The separation of linguistics and literature departments in universities was one such attempt to break free from the colonial grip of English studies. By treating language and literature as distinct fields, post colonial intellectuals and educators hoped to dismantle the ideological underpinnings that kept English at the centre. Ngugi's call for the abolition of the English department in Africa was a radical rejection of the colonial legacy in education. This gesture represents a deeper desire to reclaim the narrative and establish a new, indigenous cultural and intellectual framework.

However, the resistance to decolonising English studies is still present. As Docker's critique points out, in many post colonial nations, the legacy of British literature remains dominant, and the English literary canon continues to shape cultural and ideological thought. Despite the push for change, the status of English literature as a symbol of Western intellectual and cultural superiority is deeply entrenched in the educational systems of many former colonies. This persistent influence suggests that the ideological power of English is difficult to undo, even in societies that have gained political independence.

Ultimately, the development of post colonial literatures forces a reconsideration of the study of English, questioning its imperialistic foundations and its role in perpetuating colonial ideologies. Post colonial writers and critics aim to disrupt the accepted hierarchy of English literature, advocating the recognition of peripheral and marginalised voices. This shift challenges the "privileging norm" established by colonial education systems and calls for a more inclusive, decolonised approach to literature that reflects the diverse cultures and histories of the post colonial world.

The development of post colonial literature is intricately tied to the socio-political changes that accompanied the decline of empire. The first stage of post colonial literature, during the imperial period, reveals how literature was deeply enmeshed in the power structures of empire. Early colonial texts, written by settlers, travellers, or administrators, were not merely reports or artistic works; they were ideological tools that reinforced colonial dominance. These texts, despite their detailed observations, served to legitimise the empire by positioning the coloniser's perspective as the only valid one. The colonial authors' descriptions of "native" cultures and landscapes were always framed through the lens of imperial superiority, which systematically erased or belittled indigenous identities. This is evident in Kipling's works, where the colonial experience is often depicted as both exotic and subservient to the central, "civilised" British identity. The absence of the "home" country, referenced in his works, highlights the imperial narrative that such colonies exist only in relation to the metropolitan centre.

The second stage, when native or marginalised writers began producing literature, marks a significant shift. These writers, often educated in the language of the colonisers, were part of a complex social structure where access to literary production was controlled by the colonial elite. The fact that these works were produced in the coloniser's language reflects the complex relationship between power, language, and identity in colonial contexts. Authors like Thomas Mofolo or those in the Indo-Anglian tradition were part of a privileged class that, despite their education, remained constrained by the institutional and ideological systems imposed by the colonisers. Their works, while engaging with themes of coloni-

al brutality and cultural destruction, could not fully challenge or subvert the colonial system because the institutional structures of literature, publication, and distribution were firmly in the hands of the colonisers.

These early post colonial works were constrained not only by the formal structures of the colonial system but also by the language itself. The use of English or the language of the colonisers to write about colonised experiences is a double-edged sword. While it allowed for communication with a wider audience, it also reinforced the dominance of the imperial language and its associated values. This is where the crucial shift toward independent post colonial literature happens, when writers began to appropriate the language of the colonisers and subvert it to serve their own needs. The appropriation of language becomes a central act of resistance. Writers were no longer merely mimicking the coloniser's form but began to reshape it to tell their own stories, assert their identities, and express their unique cultural perspectives.

This appropriation of language and form marks the emergence of truly independent post colonial literature. Writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who later rejected writing in English entirely, or those who developed new modes of expression, helped establish a new, distinctive form of post colonial literary tradition. The shift from writing under the constraints of the imperial system to developing independent, culturally specific forms of literature reflects the broader movement toward decolonisation and the reclamation of indigenous identities. This process continues to be a hallmark of post colonial writing, as authors seek to decolonise language and literature itself in order to reflect their own histories, struggles, and aspirations.

The post colonial engagement with imperialism continues to be relevant for several reasons, particularly while considering the ongoing influence of the cultural and linguistic systems established during the colonial period. While political independence has been achieved in many former colonies, the persistence of British cultural hegemony through both the literary canon and the continued dominance of RS-English remains a significant force. The British literary canon continues to act as a touchstone of taste and value, and the belief in a universal "correct" version of English reinforces the cultural authority of the former imperial power. This hegemonic influence means that post colonial societies cannot completely escape the legacy of empire, even if they are no longer politically subjugated.

The incorporation of post colonial literatures into the Western canon using Eurocentric standards further marginalises these works. Initially dismissed as mere offshoots of English literature, post colonial literatures are now being brought into the fold, but often on the terms of the dominant imperial centre. This process of inclusion is not one of equal recognition but of assimilation, where post colonial works are judged according to a set of standards that originated from the imperial system. This reflects a larger pattern of imperial cultures absorbing and neutralising the subversive potential of colonised societies by co-opting them into the dominant system.

The distinction between "English" and "english" is central to understanding how language functions as a tool of both oppression and resistance. The imposition of a standardised version of English during the colonial period served not only to consolidate imperial control but also to delegitimise local languages and dialects. In this context, language became a key site of struggle, with the "standard" language representing the power of the empire and its claims to universality. Post colonial societies, in reclaiming language, subvert the imperial

order by adapting English to their own cultural and social realities. The transformation of English into "english" in various post colonial contexts allows for the expression of local identities, and the tension between these variants and the "standard" English speaks to the ongoing struggle for cultural autonomy.

This linguistic rebellion is also reflected in post colonial literature, which uses the imperial language to resist imperial narratives. Writers in post colonial societies engage in a complex dance of appropriation and subversion, taking the language of the colonisers and using it to express their own experiences, histories, and identities. The political tension between the imperial language (English) and its subverted forms (english) has led to some of the most innovative and dynamic literary productions in the modern world. This process highlights how post colonial writers navigate the legacies of empire, using language to assert their independence and challenge the ongoing cultural and intellectual dominance of the former colonisers.

Thus, the engagement with coloniality, both politically and linguistically, remains crucial for understanding how post colonial societies continue to shape their identities in the aftermath of empire. The struggle to reclaim language, to differentiate "english" from "English," and to challenge the centrality of the imperial canon are all key aspects of the post colonial experience. In this sense, post colonial literature is not just a reaction to the past but an active force in the redefinition of cultural and literary values in the present.

The theme of *place* and *displacement* in post colonial literature underscores the profound identity crisis experienced by many who have been colonised, whether through forced migration, slavery, or voluntary settlement. This crisis stems from a dislocation of self from the familiar context of home and culture and the displacement into environments that are foreign or perceived as alien. This rupture forces post colonial societies to negotiate a new understanding of identity, one that seeks to reconcile the history of displacement with the desire for authenticity and belonging.

The alienation caused by this displacement is not limited to those who were physically displaced but extends to anyone whose cultural and linguistic ties were severed by colonial rule. Even those who, like free settlers or colonists, were not subjected to slavery or direct violence, experience a form of alienation from the language and cultural practices imposed upon them by the colonising power. The example of Joseph Howe, a Canadian poet, reveals how English was ill-suited for describing the unique Canadian landscape and experience, highlighting a tension between the coloniser's language and the need to articulate a distinctive post colonial identity. Such alienation results from the sense that English, though the dominant language, was insufficient to reflect the diverse realities of the new land, climate, and culture.

This tension between place and language in post colonial contexts illustrates the deeper issue of linguistic imperialism. In colonised societies, the imposition of English (or another colonial language) led to a profound disconnect between the language of the coloniser and the lived experiences of the colonised people. Writers like Achebe and Rao were forced to innovate within this colonial linguistic framework to give voice to their experiences, using English in ways that allowed it to reflect their post colonial realities. These writers did not just adopt English; they transformed it into a medium capable of articulating their identities and histories, making the language carry the weight of colonial and post colonial experiences.

The concept of *english*, as distinct from English, is vital for understanding how post colonial societies subvert the imperial cultural formations imposed by colonial powers. Post colonial writers, in their pursuit of authenticity, moved beyond the constraints of imperial English, developing a language that could speak to the realities of their environments. This process of linguistic transformation is an act of resistance, asserting the validity of local cultural identities and rejecting the limitations of a language imposed by colonisers. English, therefore, becomes not a passive tool but an active means of both engaging with and dismantling the legacies of empire.

The struggle for a distinctive linguistic and cultural identity is central to the project of decolonisation, and the development of a unique *english* is part of this effort. In this sense, post colonial literature is not only a reflection on displacement and alienation but also an effort to reclaim space for new, hybrid identities that reflect both the pain of colonial history and the resilience of post colonial people. This ongoing negotiation with language, place, and identity is at the heart of post colonial literary and cultural production.

The emergence of *post colonial literary theory* represents a significant intellectual shift that critiques the universality claimed by European intellectual traditions and embraces the pluralism of post colonial experiences. European theories, often presented as universal and objective, were rooted in particular cultural and historical contexts that were unable to capture the lived realities of colonised peoples. The failure of European frameworks to account for the unique cultural, social, and political dynamics of post colonial societies led to the creation of indigenous theories designed to describe and make sense of these experiences.

This intellectual shift is significant because it recognises the multiplicity and diversity of post colonial voices, rejecting the hierarchical structures that once placed European culture and thought at the centre of the intellectual world. By dismantling the Eurocentric lens, post colonial theory pushes beyond monocentrism and embraces a *decentring* of knowledge, where previously marginalised cultures and experiences are given voice. This approach not only allows for a richer understanding of post colonial texts but also acknowledges the ways in which colonialism distorted cultural identity, language, and epistemology.

The destabilisation of colonial power, while initially repressive, eventually became a source of *creative energy* for post colonial societies. The very process of marginalisation pushed these societies to develop new ways of thinking, new ways of engaging with language and literature, and new intellectual traditions that were less constrained by European epistemologies. Post colonial writers and theorists have been at the forefront of this intellectual revolution, using literature as a medium to subvert colonial ideologies and reclaim cultural power. The creation of *indigenous post colonial theories* reflects this shift, as scholars from colonised regions develop frameworks that better suit their particular histories, cultures, and realities.

Post colonial theory intersects with broader questions of language and identity. Language, as a tool of imperial control, plays a central role in post colonial discourse. Writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have shown how the colonised subject must navigate and often transform the coloniser's language to articulate their own post colonial experience. Language in post colonial literature becomes both a site of resistance and a vehicle for expressing new identities that reflect both

the trauma of colonisation and the resilience of post colonial cultures.

Post colonial theory also engages with broader fields like literary theory and political analysis, challenging assumptions about universal aesthetics, values, and social systems. By revisiting and reinterpreting colonial experiences, post colonial theory contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of history, culture, and power. It emphasises that colonialism not only reshaped the territories it conquered but also transformed the intellectual and cultural systems of the colonisers and the colonised alike.

Post colonial literary theory serves as a necessary corrective to the Eurocentric paradigms that have long dominated intellectual thought. It provides a critical framework for understanding the complexities of post colonial writing and helps to articulate the ongoing struggles for cultural, linguistic, and intellectual independence. The theory's development reflects a broader movement towards pluralism, challenging monolithic narratives and developing a more inclusive and diverse global intellectual milieu.

Recap

- Bill Ashcroft is a leading scholar in post-colonial studies
- Co-authored *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), shaping post-colonial literature
- *The Empire Writes Back* asserts post-colonial literature's independence from British literature
- Post-colonial literature resists imperial ideologies using the coloniser's language
- Post-colonial studies critique Eurocentric literary theories, highlighting diverse writings
- *The Empire Writes Back* shows post-colonial literature's ongoing cultural resistance
- Post-colonial societies challenge colonial education, advocating decolonisation
- Early colonial literature reinforced imperialism, later adapted by native writers
- Political independence doesn't end cultural hegemony due to English dominance
- Post-colonial literature expresses local identities, resisting imperial language dominance
- Place and displacement themes reveal colonisation's impact on identity and belonging

Objective Questions

1. Who co-authored *The Empire Writes Back* alongside Bill Ashcroft?
2. Which Canadian poet is cited as struggling with English to describe the Canadian landscape?
3. What literary theory does *The Empire Writes Back* lay the foundation for?
4. What concept refers to the dominance of imperial powers over colonies even after independence?
5. What does post-colonial literature focus on, particularly in relation to language?
6. In the early colonial period, who primarily wrote about the colonies?
7. Which concept addresses the forced migration and identity crises of colonised peoples?
8. What is the primary critique of the British literary canon in post-colonial studies?
9. What stage in post-colonial literature involves resistance to colonial ideologies?
10. Which scholar argues that English literature was used as a "civilising" force in colonial education?

Answers

1. Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin
2. Joseph Howe
3. Post-colonial theory
4. Hegemony
5. Resistance, identity, and language
6. Europeans
7. Place and displacement
8. Its Eurocentric dominance
9. Resistance and assertion
10. Gauri Viswanathan

Assignments

1. Why is language such a critical issue in post-colonial literature?
2. Analyse the concept of "hegemony" in *The Empire Writes Back* and explore how it influences both the cultural and academic spheres in former colonies even after political independence.
3. How does *The Empire Writes Back* challenge the traditional understanding of English literature in the context of colonialism?
4. Explore the three stages in the development of post-colonial literatures as outlined in *The Empire Writes Back*
5. In what ways does the theme of place and displacement in post-colonial literature reflect the broader socio-political impacts of colonialism?

Suggested Reading

1. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures.* Routledge, 1989.
2. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge, 1994.
3. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* Grove Press, 1963.
4. Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* Pantheon Books, 1978.
5. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Macmillan, 1988.

BLOCK - 03

Poetry

Unit 1

Piano and Drums

-- Gabriel Okara

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the central theme of cultural conflict
- analyse the use of musical imagery in the poem
- explore postcolonial identity and hybridity
- interpret literary devices such as symbolism and contrast

Prerequisites

Before approaching Gabriel Okara's "Piano and Drums," it is helpful for learners to be familiar with the historical context of colonial and postcolonial Africa, particularly the cultural and psychological effects of colonisation. Understanding Nigeria's colonial history, the transition to independence, and the lasting impact of Western education and values on indigenous traditions will provide a deeper appreciation for the poem's themes.

Learners should also be acquainted with the concept of cultural hybridity, the coexistence of traditional and colonial influences in postcolonial societies, and how identity can be shaped by conflicting cultural experiences. Basic knowledge of symbolism and poetic structure will aid in recognising how Okara uses musical instruments as metaphors to explore cultural identity.

Key words

Cultural Conflict, Identity, Drums, Piano, Tradition, Modernity, Hybridity, Postcolonialism, Alienation, Nature vs. Civilisation

3.1.1 About the Poet

Gabriel Okara (1921–2019) was a Nigerian poet and novelist known for his unique style and deep cultural insights. Mostly self-educated, he began his career as a bookbinder and later wrote radio plays and poems. His poem *"The Call of the River Nun"* won an award in 1953, and by 1960, he was recognised as a skilled poet. Okara's poetry often explores life's contrasts, like life and death, using circular movement between reality and

moments of joy. He blended African thought, religion, folklore, and imagery into his writing. His first novel, *The Voice* (1964), was a bold experiment, using Ijo (Ijaw) language structure in English to reflect African ideas. The novel symbolically shows the conflict between African traditions and Western materialism. Okara also worked in civil service and was the director of Rivers State Publishing House from 1972 to 1980. His later works include *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978) and children's books like *Little Snake and Little Frog* (1981) and *An Adventure to Juju Island* (1992).

3.1.2 About the Poem

Gabriel Okara's "Piano and Drums" is a reflective and symbolic poem that addresses the theme of cultural conflict and the disorientation that arises from being caught between two different traditions, African heritage and Western influence. As a Nigerian poet, Okara draws from personal and collective experiences of colonial and postcolonial identity, making the poem a significant work within African and postcolonial literature.

The poem presents a journey through sound and memory, using the imagery of musical instruments, the drum and the piano, to symbolise traditional African culture and Western civilisation, respectively. The speaker's tone is contemplative, torn between the simplicity and naturalness of African life and the complex, sometimes alienating experience of modern Western life. Through this symbolic contrast, Okara communicates the inner turmoil of living through two conflicting cultural realities.

3.1.3 Stanza-wise Summary

Stanza 1 :

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear the jungle drums telegraphing
The mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
Like bleeding flesh, speaking of
Primal youth and the beginning,
I see the panther ready to pounce,
The leopard snarling about to leap
And the hunters crouch with spears poised;
And my blood ripples, turns torrent,
Topples the years and at once I'm
In my mother's laps a suckling;

The poem opens with the speaker hearing the jungle drums at dawn, a powerful evocation of Africa's traditional culture. These drums do not simply produce sound; they "telegraph" a mystic, almost spiritual rhythm that feels visceral, "urgent, raw / Like bleeding flesh." The phrase suggests a deep, emotional pull that transcends time and place, tapping into primal, ancestral memories.

The vivid imagery of animals, "the panther ready to pounce," "the leopard snarling," and hunters with spears brings to life a scene of ancient, natural energy. The speaker experiences a physical and emotional reaction: "my blood ripples, turns torrent." This metaphor shows how the drumming stirs him to the core, causing a temporal regression to infancy, symbolising a return to the origin, to mother and homeland. The jungle represents a world of instinct, nature, and purity untouched by modernity.

Stanza 2:

Warmed by the log fire, and now the piano
In its wooden box, mechanical
In its metallic tunes, and its harmony,
Not inborn, but drawn from the fingers
Of the man, reeling off tunes, learned;

The second stanza introduces the symbol of the piano, marking a shift in tone and setting. Unlike the organic, instinctive quality of the drum, the piano is "mechanical," confined in a "wooden box," and its "metallic tunes" stand in stark contrast to the earthy tones of the

drum. The piano represents European modernity, structured culture, and intellectual life.

Its music, though harmonious, is described as "not inborn," but acquired, emphasising its dependence on training, books, and efforts, unlike the instinctive rhythm of the drum. The man who plays it must "reel off tunes, learned," showing how this culture requires discipline and distance from nature. There is a cold, mechanical quality to this symbol which is beautiful, but emotionally and spiritually distant.

Stanza 3:

From books, and from the eyes
Of schoolmasters, I see the mother
In her loincloth and the father
In his loincloth, and so soon I
Am at the scene, lost in the labyrinth
Of its complexities, it ends in the middle
Of a phrase at a dagger point.

This final stanza brings together the two cultural experiences, the African traditional and the Western modern, highlighting the speaker's internal crisis. Through formal education and authority figures (symbolised by "books" and "schoolmasters"), the speaker becomes aware of his separation from traditional life. Yet, he still envisions his mother and father in loincloths, a strong image of indigenous identity and simplicity.

Despite this visual clarity, he is "lost in the labyrinth," a metaphor for the confusion and inner conflict caused by trying to reconcile these opposing worlds. The phrase implies being trapped in a cultural maze, with no clear direction. The poem ends on a jarring note: "at a dagger point," a metaphor for crisis, unresolved tension, and the emotional danger of cultural dislocation. The abrupt ending mimics the speaker's mental turmoil, showing that his journey between cultures offers no resolution.

3.1.4 Analysis

Gabriel Okara's "Piano and Drums" is a profound exploration of the internal conflict experienced by individuals living in postcolonial societies. The poem clearly captures the tension between two cultural forces: the African traditional way of life, represented by the drum, and modern Western civilisation, symbolised by the piano. This conflict is not external; it is deeply rooted in the speaker's psyche, highlighting the lasting impact of colonialism on personal and collective identity.

The drums in the poem evoke ancestral memory, primal instinct, and emotional immediacy. They are natural, organic, and spiritually resonant, drawing the speaker back to a time of clarity and simplicity. This portrayal reflects the poet's deep connection to African traditions and roots, and the authenticity they carry. In contrast, the piano is mechanical, structured, and learned. It represents the imposed systems of colonial education, governance, and culture, beautiful yet alienating, ordered yet emotionally distant. Okara does not romanticise tradition or demonise modernity. Instead, he reveals the complex emotional experience of a person shaped by both. The speaker is a hybrid figure, neither fully at home in the world of his ancestors nor completely integrated into the Western modernity thrust upon him. This hybridity leads to disorientation, expressed through the image of being "lost in the labyrinth." The speaker's journey through education and exposure to foreign systems does not empower him; instead, it confuses him. He ends "at a dagger point," a striking image that signifies not only unresolved conflict but also the emotional and psychological danger of living between two incompatible realities.

The poem also critiques the legacy of colonial education. Through references to "books" and "schoolmasters," Okara highlights how

colonial systems attempted to overwrite indigenous identity with foreign values and knowledge. This results in alienation, as the speaker is gradually disconnected from the instinctive world of his cultural past. Though written in English, the language of the coloniser, the poem subverts its use by reasserting African experience, rhythm, and imagery. The metaphor of music is a powerful one, as it allows Okara to contrast emotional, cultural, and psychological dimensions without overt political commentary. The unresolved ending of the poem reflects the larger condition of postcolonial societies, where identity is an ongoing negotiation, not a fixed state.

Ultimately, "Piano and Drums" is a powerful postcolonial text that captures the struggle of cultural duality. Okara articulates the pain of being divided between two worlds, the nostalgia for a rooted past, and the confusion of living a foreign present. Through its symbolic richness and emotional depth, the poem becomes a timeless expression of the hybrid self, shaped by empire.

3.1.5 Major Themes

1. Cultural Conflict

The central theme of the poem is the tension between traditional African values and modern Western influences. The drum represents the African way of life; natural, instinctive, and rooted in the land, while the piano symbolises Western civilisation; mechanical, intellectual, and learned. The speaker's experience of both creates a deep sense of dislocation where the poem's central conflict arises from the speaker's dual cultural inheritance, traditional African and modern Western. The drum evokes ancestral memory and natural simplicity, while the piano signifies foreign influence and structured knowledge. The speaker's emotional reaction to the drum and critical reflection on the piano reveal an internal struggle between authenticity and alienation. This theme resonates with many postcolonial societies where cultural identity is not singular but shaped by competing legacies.

2. Identity and Hybridity

The speaker is caught in the middle of two cultural traditions, embodying a hybrid identity. This results in emotional conflict, as he is unable to fully belong to either culture. His African roots evoke warmth and belonging, while the Western world brings confusion and complexity. Okara presents the speaker as a symbol of hybrid identity, born into a traditional culture, yet exposed and reshaped by Western education and values. The speaker's identity becomes fragmented as he tries to reconcile the immediacy of instinctive life with the complexities of structured modernity. His hybrid status brings neither balance nor wholeness but a painful consciousness of division.

3. Tradition vs. Modernity

Through the juxtaposition of musical instruments, the poem contrasts the simplicity and authenticity of African tradition with the sophistication and artificiality of Western modernity. This theme reflects broader postcolonial concerns about what is lost and gained through cultural transformation. The poem contrasts the intuitive, rhythmic, and spiritual connection of traditional life with the rational, mechanical, and learned aspects of modernity. Okara does not dismiss either entirely but suggests that the coexistence of both creates tension. Tradition is portrayed as emotionally fulfilling but perceived as "primitive" by the coloniser; modernity as intellectually superior but alienating. The speaker's journey reflects this unresolved clash.

4. Alienation and Displacement

The speaker's cultural hybridity leads to a feeling of alienation. He no longer feels ful-

ly at home in either world. The metaphor of experiences estrangement from both cultures. Though he feels rooted in traditional life, colonial systems have distanced him from it. He does not feel at home in the Western world either. His reference to being "lost in the labyrinth" illustrates his sense of psychological and cultural displacement and symbolises the emotional and cultural displacement felt by those navigating hybrid identities. This theme also explores how colonised individuals are often denied a coherent sense of self.

5. Nature vs. Civilisation

The imagery of wild animals, hunters, and the riverside associates African tradition with the natural world. In contrast, the piano's mechanical nature and dependence on formal education signify civilisation. This dichotomy underscores the different values of each culture. Nature, represented by the drums, animals, and jungle, symbolises purity, emotional connection, and ancestral power. Civilisation, embodied by the piano and education, is artificial and emotionally distant. This contrast critiques the assumption that modernity is superior, showing instead that it often lacks the spiritual and emotional depth of traditional life. The tension between these elements frames the speaker's existential dilemma.

6. Memory and Nostalgia

The poem is driven by the speaker's memory and longing for a simpler past. His nostalgic return to childhood and ancestral life is interrupted by the intrusion of Western structures, producing internal conflict. The speaker's journey is triggered by the sound of drums that awaken deep-seated memories. This longing for a return to origin, childhood, nature, and maternal comfort suggests that traditional life holds emotional meaning that modernity lacks. Yet this nostalgia is complicated by the reality of modern influences that cannot be undone. Memory becomes a bridge to a past that is both cherished and unreachable.

7. Postcolonial Critique

Okara critiques the lingering effects of colonialism that force individuals into conflicted identities. The poem subtly explores how colonial education and systems undermine indigenous ways of life and critiques the legacy of colonialism, which imposes foreign systems of knowledge and disrupts indigenous identities. The presence of "books" and "schoolmasters" reflects the colonial education system's role in creating confusion and internal conflict. The poem does not present colonialism as purely destructive but highlights its psychological and cultural costs. Okara thus invites the reader to reflect on the complex legacy of empire and the burden it places on postcolonial subjects.

3.1.6 Poetic Devices

1. Imagery

Okara employs vivid sensory imagery to contrast traditional African life with Western modernity.

- Example (Drums): "*raw, like bleeding flesh*", "*speaking of primal youth*" – appeals to sight, sound, and emotion, evoking a powerful and instinctive connection with nature and ancestry.
- Example (Piano): "*complicated, in its method / Of reaching the heart*" – highlights the complexity and indirectness of Western culture.

The imagery creates a sharp contrast between simplicity and complexity, between instinct and reason, helping readers feel the speaker's internal cultural conflict.

2. Symbolism

The piano and the drums are central symbols in the poem.

- Drums: Represent traditional African heritage—natural, communal, intuitive, and emotionally direct.
- Piano: Symbolises Western culture—structured, technical, intellectually sophisticated but emotionally distant.

Through these instruments, Okara symbolically stages the tension between indigenous and colonial influences.

3. Metaphor

Metaphors deepen the poem's emotional and philosophical impact.

- Example: "*the jungle drums telegraphing / the mystic rhythm*" – compares drumming to telecommunication, emphasizing its role in transmitting culture and emotion.
- Example: "*I wander in the mystic rhythm*" – the speaker metaphorically travels through cultural memory and identity.

These metaphors frame cultural heritage as a kind of spiritual and emotional language that shapes identity.

4. Contrast (Juxtaposition)

The entire poem is structured as a contrast between two cultural systems.

- African vs. Western: Simplicity vs. complexity, instinct vs. logic, nature vs. artifice.
- Drums vs. Piano: The physical, raw, and organic drumbeat contrasts with the composed and intellectual tone of the piano.

This contrast allows the poet to reflect on the challenges of cultural duality and identity crisis in postcolonial societies.

Recap

- The poem explores the conflict between African tradition and Western modernity
- Drums represent the primal, instinctive life tied to African heritage
- Piano symbolises European civilisation, complex, structured, and learned
- The speaker feels emotionally connected to the drum but confused by the piano
- There is a sense of cultural alienation and loss of belonging
- The speaker's identity is marked by hybridity and fragmentation
- Okara uses vivid imagery and symbolism to communicate cultural tension
- The poem critiques the effects of colonial education and influence
- The ending is unresolved, highlighting the speaker's inner turmoil
- "Piano and Drums" is a metaphor for the postcolonial experience of identity crisis

Objective Questions

1. What does the drum symbolise in the poem?
2. Which Western musical instrument is contrasted with the drum?

3. What literary device is prominently used in the poem to convey conflict?
4. Which continent is the poet Gabriel Okara from?
5. What feeling does the speaker associate with African tradition?
6. What theme represents the struggle between tradition and modernity?
7. What is the speaker's emotional state due to cultural duality?
8. Which poetic symbol represents mechanical and learned culture?
9. What is the speaker said to be lost in, indicating confusion?
10. Which theme deals with longing for the past?

Answers

1. Tradition
2. Piano
3. Symbolism
4. Africa
5. Belonging
6. Hybridity
7. Alienation
8. Piano
9. Labyrinth
10. Nostalgia

Assignments

1. Analyse the symbolic use of musical instruments in "Piano and Drums."
2. How does Gabriel Okara convey the emotional effects of cultural conflict?
3. In what ways does the poem reflect the psychological burden of colonialism?
4. Compare and contrast the speaker's experiences with African and Western cultures.
5. Discuss the ending of the poem and its implications for understanding post-colonial identity.

Suggested Reading

1. Okara, Gabriel. *The Fisherman's Invocation*. Heinemann, 1978.
2. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back*. Routledge, 1989.
3. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 1961.
4. Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann, 1958.
5. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind*. James Currey, 1986.

Unit 2

Background, Casually

- Nissim Ezekiel

Learning Outcomes

- understand the postcolonial, cultural, and personal tensions within the poem.
- analyse the poem as a work of autobiographical and confessional literature.
- explore the ways in which Ezekiel uses tone, irony, and language to portray identity.
- evaluate the impact of Western education, ideology, and displacement on postcolonial identity.
- appreciate Ezekiel's stylistic innovations in Indian English poetry.

Prerequisites

Nissim Ezekiel was a prominent Indo-Jewish poet, dramatist, and critic, often referred to as the father of modern Indian English poetry. Born in Bombay in 1924 to a Bene-Israeli Jewish family, Ezekiel lived through India's colonial past and postcolonial transformation. This positioned him as both an insider and outsider, culturally Indian but religiously and ethnically distinct. His work captures the voice of a generation of Indians negotiating between Eastern tradition and Western modernity.

In the wake of India's independence in 1947, many Indian writers in English struggled to define themselves within a literary and cultural language that was both foreign and inherited. Ezekiel, through poems like "Background, *Casually,"* writes in the language of the former coloniser but explores deeply personal and national themes. His poetry often focuses on self-reflection, irony, and a critical awareness of identity, alienation, and belonging. Understanding this background is crucial to interpreting "Background, Casually," which is both a poetic autobiography and a reflection of a broader postcolonial dilemma.

Key Concepts

Identity, Alienation, Belonging, Introspection, Irony

3.2.1 About the Poet

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004) was a prominent Indian Jewish poet and playwright who wrote in English and is considered a pioneer of Indian English literature. Born in Bombay (now Mumbai) into a well-educated Bene Israel family, he studied literature in Mumbai and

later philosophy at Birkbeck College, London, where exposure to Western art and theatre shaped his literary voice. His debut collection A Time to Change (1952) marked the beginning of a distinguished poetic career, despite criticism for reflecting colonial influences. Ezekiel's best-known works include Night of the Scorpion, The Unfinished Man, and Latter-Day Psalms, the latter earning him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983. He also received the Padma Shri in 1988. Ezekiel taught at the University of Mumbai, edited major literary journals, and mentored young poets. His time in the United States (1967-1972) inspired a resurgence in his writing, resulting in further poetry collections, four plays-including Do Not Call It Suicide-and numerous essays. His legacy remains central to the evolution of modern Indian poetry in English.

3.2.2 About the Poem

Nissim Ezekiel's "Background, *Casually"* is a powerful autobiographical poem that explores the poet's personal and cultural identity in postcolonial India. Born into a Bene-Israeli Jewish family, educated in Christian institutions, and influenced by Western ideologies, Ezekiel reflects on the complexities of growing up as a cultural outsider within his own country. The poem narrates his journey from youthful confusion to mature self-acceptance.

Written in free verse and a conversational tone, the poem combines irony, introspection, and honesty. It traces Ezekiel's early affiliations with atheism and Marxism, his disillusioning experiences in England, and his eventual return to India, not with certainty, but with a quiet embrace of his hybrid identity. The title itself "Background, Casually*"* captures this tone: it suggests an unpretentious approach to discussing serious questions of belonging, displacement, and reconciliation. More than just a personal reflection, the poem is also a postcolonial commentary on how identity is shaped by multiple, often conflicting, cultural forces. Ezekiel does not resolve these tensions but learns to live with them, casually, yet consciously. This makes the poem both a personal and universal exploration of what it means to be modern, Indian, and in-between.

3.2.3 Summary

Stanza 1–2: Childhood and Early Alienation

A poet-rascal-clown was born,
The frightened child who would not eat
Or sleep, a boy of meagre bone.
He never learned to fly a kite,
His borrowed top refused to spin.
I went to Roman Catholic school,
A mugging Jew among the wolves.
They told me I had killed the Christ,
That year I won the scripture prize.
A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.
I grew in terror of the strong
But undernourished Hindu lads,
Their prepositions always wrong,
Repelled me by passivity.

The poem begins with a self-reflective and ironic image: "A poet-rascal-clown was born." This phrase immediately sets the tone of irony and self-awareness that runs through the poem. The speaker views himself as a blend of roles, neither a hero nor an assured figure, but rather an awkward and uncertain one. He remembers being a timid and physically weak child who failed at typical childhood games like flying a kite or spinning a top, symbols of freedom and normalcy he could not attain.

He was sent to a Roman Catholic school where, as a Jewish boy among Christian children, he felt like a misfit, a "mugging Jew among the wolves." The phrase reflects his vulnerability and alienation. He was accused of killing Christ, a reference to anti-Semitic attitudes, yet ironically won a scripture prize the same year, showing the contradictions in his upbringing.

He also recalls being physically punished by a Muslim classmate and feeling intimidated by Hindu boys, who, though undernourished and grammatically incorrect in English, made him feel uncomfortable with their passive behaviour. These lines reflect the speaker's confusion and lack of belonging among people of different religions and ethnicities.

Stanza 3–5: Moral Confusion and Spiritual Search

One noisy day I used a knife.
At home on Friday nights the prayers
Were said. My morals had declined.
I heard of Yoga and of Zen.
Could I, perhaps, be rabbi saint?
The more I searched, the less I found.

As he grows older, the speaker recalls a moment of violence, "one noisy day I used a knife," which marks a break in his moral development. Though his family continues traditional Friday night prayers, his own sense of ethics begins to decline. He begins to explore alternative spiritual paths, including Yoga and Zen, even wondering if he could become a "rabbi saint." But these searches for identity and peace yield no results: "the more I searched, the less I found."

This period of the speaker's life is marked by ideological confusion and an intense desire for a coherent identity, both religious and moral. The poem reveals how difficult it was for him to reconcile his religious background with the multicultural and often conflicting environment in which he was raised.

Stanza 6–7: Leaving India and Life Abroad

Twenty-two: time to go abroad.
First, the decision, then a friend
To pay the fare. Philosophy,
Poverty and Poetry, three
Companions shared my basement room.
The London seasons passed me by.
I lay in bed two years alone,
And then a Woman came to tell
My willing ears I was the Son
Of Man. I knew that I had failed
In everything, a bitter thought.

At the age of 22, the speaker decides to go abroad, seeing it as a way to escape his background and start afresh. With the help of a friend who funds his trip, he moves to London. There, he lives in poverty with three companions: Philosophy, Poverty, and Poetry, abstract ideals and harsh realities. While in London, he suffers isolation and illness, spending two years bedridden and alone. During this time, a woman enters his life and tells him he is the "Son of Man," a possible reference to spiritual salvation or messianic fantasy. But he realises he has failed in all aspects of life, a painful realisation that deepens his disillusionment.

Stanza 8–9: Return to India and Reorientation

So, in an English cargo ship
Taking French guns and mortar shells
To Indo-China, scrubbed the decks,
And learned to laugh again at home.
How to feel it home, was the point.
Some reading had been done, but what
Had I observed, except my own
Exasperation? All Hindus are
Like that, my father used to say,
When someone talked too loudly, or
Knocked at the door like the Devil.
They hawked and spat. They sprawled around.
I prepared for the worst. Married,
Changed jobs, and saw myself a fool.
The song of my experience sung,
I knew that all was yet to sing.

After failure abroad, he returns to India, on an English cargo ship carrying weapons to Indochina, symbolically highlighting the ongoing connection between colonialism and violence. During the voyage, he does menial work like scrubbing the decks and begins to regain a sense of humour and resilience. He learns to "laugh again at home," a turning point in the

poem where the speaker begins to see India not as something to escape from, but as something to confront and live with. However, he admits that he had not truly observed or understood India before. He only reacted to it with "exasperation." His father's stereotypical comments about Hindus ("they hawked and spat") reflect inherited biases. He braces himself to face this complex and often frustrating country. He marries, changes jobs, and begins to see himself as foolish for trying to escape or reinvent himself abroad.

Stanza 10–11: Family History and Dreams

My ancestors, among the castes,
Were aliens crushing seed for bread
(The hooded bullock made his rounds).
One among them fought and taught,
A Major bearing British arms.
He told my father sad stories
Of the Boer War. I dreamed that
Fierce men had bound my feet and hands.
The later dreams were all of words.

Ezekiel reflects on his ancestry; his family, being Jews in India, were historically "aliens" working humble jobs like crushing seeds for bread. He recalls imagery of the hooded bullock going in circles, perhaps a metaphor for monotonous labour or the cyclical nature of inherited roles.

One ancestor fought for the British in the Boer War, highlighting the family's historical ties with colonial powers. The speaker dreams of being bound—symbolising the psychological burden of his background, culture, and history. Later, his dreams become dominated by words, revealing his turn toward language and poetry as the tools to process his world.

Stanza 12: Disillusionment with Language and Realisation

I did not know that words betray
But let the poems come, and lost
That grip on things the worldly prize.

I did not know that words betray
But let the poems come, and lost
That grip on things the worldly prize.
I would not suffer that again.
I look about me now and try
To formulate a plainer view:
The wise survive and serve—to play
The fool, to cash in on
The inner and the outer storms.

He acknowledges that "words betray," pointing to the limitations of language. Despite this, he continues to write poems, but in doing so, he loses his grip on practical, material success, "the worldly prize." He vows not to suffer that kind of loss again and begins a journey toward clarity and grounded perception.

He seeks to "formulate a plainer view" of life, moving beyond illusion and rhetoric toward realism. He affirms that the wise survive not by escaping life's challenges but by enduring them with humility and humour "to play / The fool, to cash in on / The inner and the outer storms."

Final Stanza: Commitment, Belonging, and Identity

The Indian landscape sears my eyes.
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners.
They say that I am singular,
Their letters overstate the case.
I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am.

In the final lines, the speaker affirms his deep, though complicated, connection with India. The landscape "sears" his eyes, a metaphor for its intensity and perhaps discomfort, but also permanence. He sees himself as part of it now, though still viewed as "singular" or exotic by foreign observers.

He notes that others overstate his uniqueness in letters and commentary, but he remains grounded. His final commitment is clear and quiet: he will stay where he is. Others may go to remote or rural areas in search of purpose, but his own "backward place" is right here; his home, his identity, with all its contradictions and challenges.

3.2.4 Analysis

"Background Casually" is one of Nissim Ezekiel's most introspective and confessional poems. Written in free verse, it traces his life's journey from childhood to mature self-realisation. Beneath its simple, conversational tone lies a profound exploration of identity, alienation, belonging, and cultural negotiation. The poem's title is ironic; while it refers to the speaker's cultural and historical background, the word "casually" suggests an understated, even reluctant, exploration of deeply complex themes. This juxtaposition sets the tone for the poem's thematic richness and critical depth.

It is more than an autobiographical account; it is a postcolonial document of survival, irony, and reconciliation. Ezekiel writes from the margins, but not with bitterness; he writes with clarity and self-awareness. His poem resists romanticism, ideology, and fixed identities. Instead, it embraces the hybrid, the ordinary, and the contradictory as central to modern Indian identity. Through the act of writing, Ezekiel asserts his place, not just in geography, but in literary and cultural discourse. His poem is both a critique of colonial hangovers and a celebration of an Indian self that refuses simplification. "Background, Casually" stands as a vital postcolonial text that speaks of the modern Indian condition with honesty, subtlety, and poetic grace.

As a postcolonial text, the poem offers insights into the psychological and cultural struggles of a subject caught between the colonial legacy and the emerging Indian self. Ezekiel, born a Jewish minority in India, educated in British institutions, and later exposed to Western ideologies, embodies the postcolonial condition of hybridity and fragmented identity. The poem becomes a vehicle for articulating this identity crisis and for asserting a form of reconciliation through literary expression.

3.2.5 Major Themes

Personal vs. Cultural Identity

At its core, the poem explores the tension between individual identity and cultural heritage. Ezekiel does not present his life as a seamless journey but as one marked by conflict, confusion, and contradiction. From his earliest memories of failing at childhood games and feeling alienated at school, he is portrayed as an outsider. His Jewish identity becomes a source of mockery ("They told me I had killed the Christ"), and his physical weakness and awkwardness isolate him from his peers.

Yet, this alienation is not merely personal; it reflects the marginalised position of minorities in postcolonial India. Ezekiel belongs to a group that is historically present but culturally sidelined. His sense of disconnection is heightened by the cultural hegemony of the dominant Hindu and Muslim communities and the lingering influence of colonial Christianity.

The Postcolonial Dilemma: In-Betweenness and Hybridity

Ezekiel's speaker experiences what Homi K. Bhabha describes as cultural hybridity, being suspended between two or more cultural systems without fully belonging to any. His education is Western (Roman Catholic school), his religion is Jewish, and his nationality is Indian. These overlapping identities result in a fragmented sense of self.

The line "The more I searched, the less I found" captures the deep-rooted confusion

experienced by those negotiating inherited Western frameworks with their local realities.

The speaker's decision to go to England, seen traditionally as the centre of civilisation, is a classic postcolonial motif. In literature, colonised subjects often look to the "metropolitan centre" to find fulfilment or identity. However, Ezekiel quickly realises that England offers no resolution; it intensifies his exile and failure. This movement from colony to metropole and back, ending in disillusionment, is a powerful postcolonial narrative of displaced belonging.

Language and Postcolonial Expression

A striking aspect of the poem is its use of simple, unadorned English, which reflects Ezekiel's conscious attempt to reshape the coloniser's language into an instrument of personal and national expression. Though educated in English, the poet uses it not to imitate the British but to express his unique Indian voice.

This connects to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument about language and decolonisation. Though Ezekiel writes in English, he fills it with Indian sensibility, rhythm, and concerns, thus "domesticating" the language of the coloniser. His reference to Indian behaviour, idioms, and family customs ("They hawked and spat. They sprawled around.") reclaims English for Indian expression.

Irony and Self-Reflexivity as Tools of Resistance

Ezekiel's use of irony is not simply humour; it becomes a literary strategy of resistance. By mocking his own ideological shifts, from Marxism to mysticism, and by gently critiquing his youthful aspirations and failures, he exposes the instability of grand narratives. The poem's confessional style, stripped of heroism, undercuts the colonial and nationalist tendencies to glorify identity. Instead, he embraces the uncertainty and contradictions of the self.

His tone is self-deprecating, but not self-loathing. It allows him to speak back to both colonial systems (which marginalised him) and nationalist narratives (which ignored his difference). In doing so, he asserts a unique identity; flawed, hybrid, and entirely his own.

Commitment to Place and Identity

The closing lines mark a significant postcolonial assertion of rootedness and agency. While others may choose to work in "some remote and backward place," Ezekiel claims his "backward place" as home. This is a subtle but powerful statement: the speaker accepts India, not as a romantic homeland, but as a flawed and complex space that is still his own. In this way, he reverses the colonial gaze, no longer seeking approval from the West or escape through exile.

By "staying where I am," the poet makes a political and poetic commitment. His identity is not an exotic anomaly to be explained to foreigners ("They say that I am singular"), but a legitimate and stable form of being. It is through this acceptance of the fragmented self, shaped by history, that the speaker finds peace.

3.2.6 Literary Devices

Free Verse: The absence of rhyme and fixed meter gives the poem a conversational tone, mirroring the speaker's informal, introspective voice.

Allusion: References to colonial education, Western ideologies, and personal experiences invite broader interpretations linked to history, politics, and culture.

Symbolism: England symbolises the false promise of cultural belonging, while India, though conflicted, becomes a place of personal reconciliation.

Tone: The tone is casual yet layered with in-

trospection, creating a voice that is authentic, humorous, and deeply self-aware.

His experimentation with atheism, Marxism, Yoga, and Zen reflects the postcolonial subject's search for ideological stability in a world where colonial systems have collapsed, but indigenous ones are not wholly accepted or sufficient. The line "The more I searched, the less I found" captures the deep-rooted confusion experienced by those negotiating inherited Western frameworks with their local realities.

The speaker's decision to go to England, seen traditionally as the centre of civilisation, is a classic postcolonial motif. In literature, colonised subjects often look to the "metropolitan centre" to find fulfilment or identity. However, Ezekiel quickly realises that England offers no resolution; it intensifies his exile and failure. This movement from colony to metropole and back, ending in disillusionment, is a powerful postcolonial narrative of displaced belonging.

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3.2.7 Literary Devices

Free Verse: The absence of rhyme and fixed meter gives the poem a conversational tone, mirroring the speaker's informal, introspective voice.

Irony: Phrases like "committed atheist and Marxist" and "fool in foreign land" are rich in irony, exposing the gap between youthful ideals and mature understanding.

Allusion: References to colonial education, Western ideologies, and personal experiences invite broader interpretations linked to history, politics, and culture.

Symbolism: England symbolises the false promise of cultural belonging, while India, though conflicted, becomes a place of personal reconciliation.

Tone: The tone is casual yet layered with introspection, creating a voice that is authentic, humorous, and deeply self-aware.

Recap

- "Background Casually" is an autobiographical poem tracing Ezekiel's journey of identity
- It begins with his upbringing in a minority Jewish family in Bombay
- The speaker recounts his Western education and his brief ideological affiliations with atheism and Marxism
- His move to England reflects a desire to escape cultural confusion, but leads to deeper alienation
- England fails to provide the artistic and personal fulfilment he sought.
- Returning to India, he learns to accept his contradictions and layered identity
- The poem critiques colonial education and the legacy of cultural dislocation
- Ezekiel uses irony and simplicity to reflect on profound themes like exile, belonging, and hybridity
- The title suggests a relaxed, honest acceptance of a complex personal and cultural past
- Ultimately, the poem affirms that identity is not fixed but negotiated through self-awareness and maturity

Objective Questions

1. What cultural background does Ezekiel belong to?
2. What tone does the poet adopt in "Background, Casually"?
3. What ideology did the speaker briefly embrace in youth?
4. What does England represent in the poem?
5. How does the poet view his return to India?
6. Which form is used in the poem?
7. What theme is most central to the poem?
8. What is suggested by the word "casually" in the title?
9. What literary device is used to critique the speaker's youthful convictions?
10. What broader postcolonial issue does the poem reflect?

Answers

1. Jewish (Bene-Israeli) community in India.
2. Conversational and ironic.
3. Marxism and atheism.
4. A false ideal of cultural escape and artistic success.
5. As a moment of self-reckoning and acceptance.
6. Free verse.
7. Identity and cultural displacement.
8. A calm, understated acceptance of life's contradictions.
9. Irony.
10. The struggle of hybrid identity in a formerly colonised society.

Assignments

1. Analyse the use of irony in "Background Casually" and how it shapes the speaker's self-reflection.
2. In what ways does the poem reflect the dilemma of postcolonial identity?
3. Discuss the theme of exile and return in Ezekiel's poem with reference to cultural belonging.
4. How does Ezekiel use autobiographical narrative to explore broader social and political concerns?
5. Explore the poem as a commentary on the inadequacies of Western ideologies in understanding Indian identity.

Suggested Reading

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3. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Born Fiction*. Heinemann, 1971.
4. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 1989.
5. Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. Sahitya Akademi, 1982.

Unit 3

Australia

- A.D. Hope

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to,

- understand the poem as a cultural and political critique of Australia.
- analyse the use of irony, imagery, and classical references.
- explore the poet's ambivalence towards national identity.
- interpret symbols such as the desert and European culture.

Prerequisites

Before studying A.D. Hope's "Australia," learners should have a basic understanding of Australia's colonial history and its development as a settler nation. It is helpful to be aware of the country's cultural ties to Britain and the ongoing debate about Australia's national identity, especially in the context of its relatively recent cultural independence from European influence. A familiarity with literary devices such as irony and satire will enable students to better appreciate Hope's critical tone and the subtle humour embedded in his bleak imagery. Additionally, some knowledge of classical literature and biblical allusions, such as references to ancient Troy or prophetic deserts, will enrich the reading of the poem, as Hope frequently draws upon these traditions to contrast the perceived cultural shallowness of modern Australia with the grandeur of past civilisations. Understanding these contexts will allow students to engage more deeply with the poem's themes of cultural barrenness, exile, and the possibility of renewal.

Key Words

Cultural Identity, Nationalism, Civilisation, Landscape, Exile

3.3.1 About the Poet

A.D. Hope's "Australia" stands as an exploration of the poet's homeland, offering a sharp examination of both its physical and cultural landscapes. While the title might initially evoke images of national pride or patriotic celebration, the poem quickly reveals itself as a meditation on the perceived spiritual barrenness and cultural emptiness of

Australia. Written in the mid-20th century, a period when Australia was still solidifying its identity on the global stage, Hope's poem reflects a nation grappling with its place in both the historical and cultural narratives of the world.

3.3.2 About the Poem

Hope's depiction of Australia as a "youthful" nation, still in its formative stages, invites readers to consider the country's physical harshness and its cultural immaturity. The poet contrasts the ancient, almost mythic qualities of the land with the "newness" of Australian civilisation, questioning whether modern Australia, in its pursuit of progress, has overlooked its spiritual and cultural roots. Through vivid imagery and allusions to classical and Bibdical texts, Hope draws a comparison between the enduring, timeless qualities of the land and the perceived shallowness of contemporary life. This juxtaposition creates an ironic tension, as the vast, unyielding landscape of Australia stands in stark contrast to what Hope perceives as the nation's inability to cultivate a deeper, more meaningful cultural identity.

The poem's tone is defined by this tension, as Hope critiques Australia's cultural landscape while also hinting at the possibility of transformation. In the final stanza, the poet introduces a sense of cautious optimism, suggesting that despite the harshness and spiritual barrenness, there remains a potential for Australia to awaken to a richer cultural life. This subtle shift toward hope provides a complex and layered reading of the poem, where the critique of Australia's present is balanced by a glimmer of future possibilities. Ultimately, "Australia" captures both the disillusionment and the potential for growth that defines the nation's place in the world at the time of its writing.

3.3.3 Stanza-wise Summary

Stanza 1

A nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey,
In the field uniform of modern wars,
Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws
Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.
They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry.

This opening stanza presents Australia as a barren, lifeless land. The "drab green and desolate grey" reflect a dull and oppressive landscape, similar to a war zone with the "uniform of modern wars." The hills are imagined as the broken remains of ancient beasts, "Sphinx" or "stone lion," evoking ruins of civilisations past. Although commonly called a "young" country, the poet claims this is false: Australia is ancient, empty, and spiritually infertile. The metaphor of a post-menopausal woman with "a womb... dry" suggests that while the land may appear gentle ("tender"), it lacks the capacity for creative or cultural birth.

Stanza 2

Without songs, architecture, history:
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,
Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity
Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
In them, each other's boredom and disgust
Is a god we might believe in; only lust
Sharpens their hunger in the itch for dirt.

Here, Hope accuses Australia of lacking the cultural markers of a civilisation, with no "songs, architecture, history." He contrasts Australia with "younger lands" that have rich emotional and spiritual traditions. The image

of rivers disappearing into "inland sands" symbolises wasted potential, while the "river of her immense stupidity" delivers a biting insult to the perceived intellectual emptiness of the people. The population is depicted as dull and spiritually disconnected, with no meaningful passion, only lust and physical desire that manifest in a craving for base pleasures ("the itch for dirt"). This stanza reinforces the idea of a nation devoid of higher ideals.

Stanza 3

Those endless, outstretched paws, like the blind head
But for the grace of God, go to the grave
In ignorance of whom they saluted; save
The unbetraying corpse of human pride,
Who knew the truth and kept it to the end.
In cities of the mind where instincts fade,
Their blank-faced cousins crowd the slab of shade
And drink their drowsy tea, and wait, and wait.

This stanza continues the critique, evoking a spiritual paralysis across the land. The landscape is again described as "paws," now connected with blind submission. People live and die "in ignorance," unaware of what they have "saluted," a metaphor for blind allegiance to meaningless values. The "corpse of human pride" may suggest the death of ambition, idealism, or integrity. In imagined cities, "cities of the mind," instincts have faded. The people ("blank-faced cousins") are passive and lifeless, sitting in the shade, drinking tea, waiting without purpose or hope. This stanza conveys a sense of stagnation, as if Australia is waiting for something undefined that may never arrive.

Stanza 4

And her five cities, like five teeming sores,
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
Where second-hand Europeans pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.
Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come.

In this powerful stanza, Hope compares Australia's major cities to "five teeming sores," parasitic and draining the land's vitality. These urban spaces are described as overcrowded and culturally dependent on Europe, populated by "second-hand Europeans," immigrants who imitate European customs without original innovation. However, here the poem takes a turn: the poet admits his own return to Australia, willingly escaping the "lush jungle of modern thought." He finds, instead, a desert empty but perhaps holy. This alludes to Biblical deserts where prophets emerged, suggesting that a cultural rebirth or spiritual awakening is still possible.

Stanza 5

For although she walks in dry and barren ways,
When the words she utters are meaningless, as the sand,
And sufferings are dry as the salt of tears shed
For those who die with neither name nor face,
In a neutral room in the suburbs, without pain,
Or hatred, or love, I see in her the promise
Of another Troy, a nation born again
Out of the brave, the strong who are not afraid.

The final stanza presents a more hopeful vision, though it still acknowledges the spiritual dryness. Australia is still described as "walking in dry and barren ways," and her speech and suffering are "meaningless," yet within this bleakness, the poet sees potential for greatness. He imagines a future where Australia might become "another Troy," a reference to ancient nobility, tragedy, and rebirth. This rebirth, however, depends on the "brave" and the "strong who are not afraid." The stanza ends with a conditional promise: Australia can be "born again" if it overcomes fear and spiritual emptiness. It is a cautious optimism

that contrasts with the despair of the earlier stanzas.

3.3.4 Analysis

A.D. Hope's "Australia" is at once a biting satire and an ambivalent love letter to the poet's homeland. Through stark imagery and harsh metaphors, Hope presents the nation as culturally shallow and spiritually sterile. The Australian landscape is depicted as vast and lifeless, while its cities are likened to diseased organisms, suggesting that the promise of civilisation has given rise to emptiness rather than enrichment. Yet beneath this critique lies a reluctant affection, a glimmer of possibility that the country might one day rise to cultural and intellectual significance. The poem is deeply ironic. While it employs the elevated language of epic grandeur, evoking biblical and classical references, it uses these to describe a land perceived as unworthy of such high associations. This deliberate mismatch generates a powerful satire on national pride and myth-making. Hope critiques the superficial optimism that often characterises nationalist rhetoric, especially in settler colonies like Australia. His references to Troy and Israel highlight how nations construct their identities by drawing on ancient myths, even when their current reality falls short of such grandeur.

From a postcolonial perspective, "Australia" can be read as a commentary on the tensions between settler identity and indigenous history, between cultural imitation and originality. Hope's Australia is a postcolonial nation struggling with its lack of authentic cultural traditions, burdened by its colonial legacy. The poem critiques the way Australia, in attempting to model itself on European civilisation, has failed to cultivate a distinctive voice of its own. This cultural mimicry, anxiety over authenticity and origin, is a central theme in postcolonial literature. Moreover, the poem's silence about Indigenous Australians is questionable. By presenting the land as empty, harsh, and waiting to be civilised, the poem indirectly reflects the colonial erasure of Aboriginal presence and culture. This absence aligns with the colonial myth of "terra nullius," where the land is imagined as uninhabited and spiritually vacant before European settlement. A postcolonial reading thus reveals that even as Hope critiques the failures of modern Australia, he may also be complicit in marginalising its pre-colonial history. At the same time, the poem is self-aware. The speaker includes himself in the critique, admitting his own contradictory attachment to the land. His hope is not easily won; it is fragile and conditional. The final stanza introduces the possibility that Australia, like Troy or Israel in exile, may achieve greatness, but this future depends on cultural self-awareness and renewal. In this vision, Hope becomes a reluctant prophet: critical, ironic, but not entirely without faith.

In this way, "Australia" can be seen as both a product of its colonial legacy and a challenge to it. It interrogates the myths of national identity while holding out the possibility of cultural transformation. The poem oscillates between disillusionment and hope, between condemnation and possibility, an ambivalence that captures the complex emotional terrain of postcolonial nationalism.

3.3.5 Major Themes

1. National Identity and Cultural Critique

A central theme of the poem is Hope's sceptical examination of Australian national identity. While many patriotic discourses glorify Australia as a land of opportunity and beauty, Hope offers a stark contrast, portraying it as a young, culturally barren nation. He mocks its lack of deep-rooted intellectual and artistic

traditions, suggesting its culture is superficial and disconnected from the spiritual and philosophical depth associated with older civilisations. His references to "pub talk" and shallow distractions satirise Australia's self-satisfaction. This critique calls for a more mature and self-aware cultural development.

2. Emptiness of Landscape and Spirit

The physical landscape of Australia, described as a "nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey," becomes a metaphor for spiritual and cultural emptiness. This barrenness isn't just geographical; it extends to the national soul. The repetition of dull colours and lifeless images evokes a sense of sterility and hopelessness. For Hope, this landscape has not yet inspired a civilisation rich in meaning or purpose, suggesting that external emptiness mirrors internal desolation.

3. Irony and Satire

Hope's tone is thick with irony and satire. While the title "Australia" might imply a celebratory or patriotic poem, he instead delivers harsh metaphors such as "five teeming sores" to describe major cities. This shockingly negative imagery is intended to jolt the reader out of complacency, forcing a more honest reckoning with the nation's shortcomings. At the same time, by using the grand language of classical and biblical tradition, Hope satirises the gap between national myth and lived reality, revealing the absurdity of pretending cultural greatness where there is none.

4. Exile and Belonging

Despite his critical tone, Hope admits in the fourth stanza that "some like me turn gladly home," showing a conflicted emotional bond with Australia. The poem portrays Australia as a spiritual exile, a nation wandering "in dry and barren ways," much like the biblical Israelites. This exile is not only national but personal; the poet himself feels displaced. Yet, this very sense of exile opens the door to the possibility of redemption, suggesting that a new cultural identity might emerge from this spiritual journey.

5. Hope and Possibility of Renewal

In the final stanza, Hope shifts from critique to cautious optimism. He compares Australia to ancient Troy, implying that just as Troy gave rise to heroic myths and tragedies, Australia too might eventually produce a rich cultural legacy. This hope is not romantic or naïve; it is grounded in the recognition that greatness must be earned through struggle, self-awareness, and cultural growth. Thus, the poem ends on a note of tentative possibility rather than despair.

6. Classical vs. Contemporary Tensions

Hope frequently uses classical and biblical allusions, Troy, the desert, exile, etc., to contrast the ideals of ancient civilisations with modern Australia's perceived cultural poverty. His reference points include the glories of ancient Rome and Greece, with their profound artistic, philosophical, and civic traditions. These serve as a standard against which he measures Australia and finds it lacking. The tension here is not just cultural but temporal: Australia is a new country struggling under the weight of an old legacy it cannot yet live up to.

7. Civilisation vs. Nature

Another underlying theme is the tension between civilisation and the natural world. The Australian landscape is shown as vast, empty, and uninviting, not nurturing civilisation, but resisting it. The poet questions whether a meaningful culture can emerge in such a setting. This raises broader questions about whether civilisation must be rooted in a specific kind of environment, or whether culture can thrive even in harsh, barren conditions, an idea hinted at in the poem's final vision.

8. Settler Colonial Anxiety

While not overt, the poem carries postcolonial undercurrents, particularly in the way it reflects the unease of a settler colony trying to forge its identity. The land, ancient and vast, remains unyielding and indifferent to European cultural imposition. Hope's poem critiques the assumption that transplanting European values automatically results in civilisation, showing instead the psychological and cultural unease that comes from being disconnected from both Indigenous heritage and European depth.

3.3.6 Poetic Devices

1. *Imagery*

Hope's poem is rich in visual, tactile, and symbolic imagery that paints Australia as a bleak and barren place. His descriptions are often unflattering, emphasising lifelessness and sterility.

- Example: "Her rivers of water drown among inland sands": this image evokes a sense of futility, where even life-giving water is lost in an arid, unyielding landscape.
- Example: "Five cities, like five teeming sores": cities, usually symbols of progress and civilisation, are described here as festering wounds, suggesting moral and cultural decay.

The imagery enhances the critique of Australia's natural environment and urban culture, suggesting a disconnect between physical vastness and cultural depth.

2. *Irony*

Irony is central to the poem's tone and structure. The title "*Australia*" may lead readers to expect a celebration of the nation, but Hope delivers a sharp, almost cynical critique.

- The poem uses epic language to describe a land that, in the speaker's eyes, is spiritually hollow. The ironic grandeur exposes the gap between mythic national pride and actual cultural vacuity.
- Example: Describing Australia as a "younger son" of Western civilisation implies inherited greatness, yet the poem undercuts this with depictions of barrenness and sterility.

Irony also reflects the speaker's conflicted position—both critical of and emotionally connected to the country.

3. *Allusion*

Hope weaves classical and biblical allusions throughout the poem to position Australia within a grander civilisational narrative, even as he critiques its failure to live up to such traditions.

- Classical allusions: Hope references ancient civilisations like "Troy," suggesting that even a spiritually barren land may one day rise to cultural greatness.
- Biblical allusions: The reference to "Israel in exile" evokes the idea of spiritual testing, implying that Australia might also undergo a transformation.

These allusions elevate the subject matter while simultaneously exposing the emptiness of applying such grand histories to a culture still in its infancy.

4. *Personification*

Australia is repeatedly personified, allowing the poet to critique the land as though it were a human figure with character traits.

- Example: "Her rivers of water drown…" – the land becomes active, struggling against its own geography.

- Example: Australia as a "younger son" frames the nation as immature and in need of guidance, dependent on older European "parents" for culture.

This device allows Hope to make his critique more intimate and emotional, drawing out both disdain and reluctant hope.

5. *Metaphor*

Metaphor is perhaps the most important device in the poem, used to describe both the land and its people in abstract, often disturbing terms.

- Example: "Five teeming sores": cities are not places of life but of infection, suggesting that progress has brought moral decay.
- Example: "Womb of silence": an ambiguous metaphor. The womb could signify potential and birth, but silence suggests emptiness and suppression. It captures both sterility and latent possibility.

These metaphors reinforce the poem's core theme: Australia as a land physically rich but culturally impoverished.

6. *Symbolism*

Many natural elements serve as symbols of deeper cultural and spiritual conditions.

- The desert: symbolises barrenness, not only environmental but also cultural and spiritual. It represents the poet's view of Australia as lacking depth and creativity.
- Water/rivers: normally symbols of life, are portrayed here as wasted or swallowed by the sand, further suggesting that potential is lost or misdirected.
- The cities: symbolise modern Australia, but they are diseased and corrupted, offering no refuge or inspiration.

Symbolism allows Hope to extend his critique beyond surface-level observations into abstract commentary on national identity.

7. *Allegory (Postcolonial Perspective)*

Read allegorically, the poem can be seen as a postcolonial critique of a settler nation caught between the cultural authority of its European "parents" and its own lack of identity.

- The "younger son" can be interpreted as a metaphor for Australia's postcolonial status, second in line, overlooked, and struggling for recognition.
- The silence about Indigenous cultures reflects a colonial mind-set, portraying the land as "empty" and "uncivilised" before European arrival.

Recap

- Cultural & Political Critique: The poem critiques Australia's cultural barrenness and questions its national identity, seeing it as spiritually and intellectually undeveloped
- Tone of Irony & Satire: Hope uses irony and satire to contrast the grandeur of classical references with the perceived mediocrity of modern Australia
- Imagery of Barren Landscape: Descriptive imagery of lifeless landscapes reflects Australia's spiritual and cultural emptiness

- Tension between Europe and Australia: Australians are depicted as imitators of European culture, struggling to form a unique identity
- Ambivalence toward Homeland: Despite criticism, Hope expresses a personal connection to Australia and a reluctant sense of hope
- Biblical and Classical Allusions: References to Troy, deserts, and prophets elevate the poem while highlighting Australia's failure to match ancient cultural legacies
- Postcolonial Subtext: The poem critiques settler colonial anxiety but also reinforces colonial erasure by ignoring Indigenous cultures
- Stagnation and Waiting: Australians are portrayed as passive and disconnected, symbolising cultural stagnation and lack of direction
- Symbolism of Cities and Deserts: Cities are likened to "teeming sores," while deserts symbolise both cultural emptiness and potential prophecy
- Hope for Renewal: The poem ends with cautious optimism, envisioning a cultural rebirth akin to a modern "Troy" through courage and renewal

Objective Questions

1. Who is the poet of the poem "Australia"?
2. What natural element symbolises barrenness in the poem?
3. What literary device is primarily used to convey satire?
4. Which continent is Australia culturally tied to in the poem?
5. What emotional state does the poet associate with Australian cities?
6. Which ancient civilisation is referenced to symbolise rebirth?
7. What tone dominates the first part of the poem?
8. What metaphor is used to describe Australian cities?
9. What type of identity crisis is central to the poem?
10. What kind of potential does the poet ultimately see in Australia?

Answers

1. Hope
2. Desert
3. Irony
4. Europe
5. Boredom

6. Troy
7. Satirical
8. Sores
9. National
10. Renewal

Assignments

1. Discuss the use of irony in A.D. Hope's "Australia."
2. Analyse how the poem critiques Australian national identity.
3. How does Hope use landscape as a metaphor for spiritual and cultural emptiness?
4. Examine the classical and biblical allusions in the poem.
5. Explore the ambivalence in the poet's tone towards Australia.

Suggested Reading

- Hope, A.D. *Collected Poems*. Angus & Robertson, 1966.
- Turner, Graeme. *Making It National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture*. Allen & Unwin, 1994.
- Ashcroft, Bill et al. *The Empire Writes Back*. Routledge, 1989.
- Bennett, Bruce. *Australian Short Fiction: A History*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002.
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Unit 4

A Far Cry from Africa

- Derek Walcott

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to,

- understand the postcolonial undertones of the poem
- analyse the poet's internal conflict regarding identity
- explore the poem's use of violent imagery and historical references
- interpret the tone, mood, and rhetorical devices used in the poem

Prerequisites

Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" is a powerful poetic response to the British suppression of the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya during the 1950s. The poem explores the complexity of colonial violence, identity crisis, and cultural dissonance experienced by the poet himself, who is of mixed African and European descent. The poem is a rich tapestry of history, nature, and personal turmoil, rendered in lyrical and often brutal imagery. Through his conflicted position, Walcott explores questions of loyalty, language, belonging, and moral ambiguity. The poem is a landmark piece in postcolonial literature that addresses the profound psychological and cultural ramifications of imperialism.

Key Words

Colonialism, Violence, Identity, Hybridity, Guilt

3.4.1 About the Poet

Derek Walcott (1930–2017) was a distinguished West Indian poet and playwright renowned for his vivid exploration of Caribbean identity and cultural tensions. Born in Saint Lucia, he was educated at St. Mary's College and the University of the West Indies. He began writing poetry early and also worked as a teacher and journalist across the Caribbean. His involvement in theatre began in the 1950s, with further training in New York, after which he divided his time between Trinidad and the United States, teaching at Boston University.

Walcott's poetic career gained prominence with In a Green Night (1962), which celebrated the natural beauty of the Caribbean. His early works, such as The Castaway and The Gulf, express themes of personal isolation and cultural hybridity. Later poems like Sea Grapes and The Star-Apple Kingdom adopted a more restrained style to address issues of race and language. His book-length poem Another Life (1973) was a reflective autobiographical work. Walcott continued to examine his complex identity in The Fortunate Traveller and Midsummer, depicting the tension between his Caribbean roots and life in America. In 1992, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his profound and lyrical contributions to world literature.

3.4.2 About the Poem

Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" is a seminal work in postcolonial poetry that confronts the moral complexities and emotional turmoil caused by colonialism. Written in the aftermath of the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya during the 1950s, the poem addresses the brutal reality of British imperialism and the African resistance against it. However, Walcott's exploration is not limited to political commentary; it is deeply personal. As a poet of mixed African and European descent, Walcott finds himself torn between two identities, cultures, and histories. The poem becomes a lens through which he examines his own fractured sense of self and the broader psychological impact of empire on colonised individuals.

The poem is notable for its clear imagery, symbolic contrasts, and raw emotional intensity. It interweaves the natural beauty of Africa with the grotesque violence of colonial conflict, reflecting the inner conflict of the speaker. Walcott's refined poetic style combines classical literary elements with postcolonial critique, making the poem a powerful expression of hybrid identity and historical consciousness. "A Far Cry from Africa" remains a poignant exploration of loyalty, guilt, language, and the struggle to reconcile divided heritage.

Derek Walcott, a Nobel Prize-winning poet from Saint Lucia, writes from the perspective of a postcolonial subject deeply divided by his heritage. In "A Far Cry from Africa," he responds to the brutal suppression of the Mau Mau rebellion, an anti-colonial revolt in Kenya. The poem is a blend of historical narrative and personal reflection, portraying the violent conflict between the British Empire and the Kenyan resistance, while also delving into the poet's internal conflict. Walcott's use of language is deliberate and lyrical. He evokes powerful images that highlight the bloodshed and moral dilemmas of colonial rule. The speaker is caught in a painful divide between his African ancestry and his British cultural inheritance. This personal dissonance is a reflection of the broader postcolonial condition. The poem resonates with anguish, confusion, and emotional intensity. The speaker does not offer easy solutions but instead forces the reader to confront the lasting wounds of empire.

3.4.3 Stanza-wise Summary

Stanza 1:

A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies,
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:
"Waste no compassion on these separate dead!"
Statistics justify and scholars seize
The salients of colonial policy.
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?
To savages, expendable as Jews?

The poem opens with an image of wind stirring the "tawny pelt of Africa," evoking the beauty and raw vitality of the continent. This serenity is quickly disrupted by references to violence, with the Kikuyu people feeding like

flies on the "bloodstreams of the veldt." The phrase "corpses are scattered through a paradise" starkly contrasts death with beauty, reflecting how colonial violence desecrates the natural world.

Walcott criticises the impersonal way colonial violence is rationalised, through "statistics" and academic analysis, while ignoring human suffering. The stanza ends with shocking imagery: a white child murdered in their bed and a comparison of African lives to Jews during the Holocaust. This challenges the reader to confront colonial racism and the double standards in valuing lives.

Stanza 2:

Threshed out by beaters, the long rushes break
In a white dust of ibises whose cries
Have wheeled since civilisation's dawn
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain.
The violence of beast on beast is read
As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,
While he calls courage still that native dread
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.

In this stanza, Walcott explores the idea that violence in nature is considered normal and inevitable: "the violence of beast on beast is read / As natural law." However, human beings, who aspire to higher ideals and morality, are paradoxically more brutal. He juxtaposes human warfare with animal instincts but criticises how humans glorify violence and warfare in the name of civilisation.

The line "delirious as these worried beasts" reflects the madness and anxiety of mankind. The metaphor of war as a "dance" to the "tightened carcass of a drum" suggests that even the rituals of war are rooted in death. The "white peace contracted by the dead" is a haunting phrase, suggesting that peace, when enforced by colonial powers, is achieved only after horrific violence and death.

Stanza 3:

Again brutish necessity wipes its hands
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause; again
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,
The gorilla wrestles with the superman.
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 Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

This final stanza becomes intensely personal. The poet reflects on the repeated justifications for colonial violence, referring to them as "dirty causes" and recalling past atrocities like the Spanish Civil War. The metaphor "the gorilla wrestles with the superman" symbolises the struggle between colonised people and imperial powers.

The speaker admits his own inner conflict: "I who am poisoned with the blood of both." His African and European heritage cause him to feel torn "to the vein," revealing the depth of his internal struggle. He questions how he can choose between his ancestral homeland and the language and culture he has grown to love.

The stanza ends with a cry of anguish: choosing either side feels like betrayal. The poet feels paralysed, unable to support one without forsaking the other. This powerful ending underscores the poem's central theme: the tragedy of hybrid identity and the emotional cost of colonisation.

3.4.4 Analysis

From a postcolonial perspective, "A Far Cry from Africa" is a powerful exploration of the legacy of British imperialism and the com-

plex effects of colonial rule on identity. The poem engages with the brutal history of colonisation, particularly in Africa, and reflects the emotional and ethical dilemmas faced by individuals born of both coloniser and colonised heritage. One of the poem's central postcolonial concerns is the idea of hybrid identity. Walcott himself is of African and European descent, and he uses his speaker as a symbol of cultural and racial hybridity. This hybridity, instead of being a source of harmony, becomes a site of conflict, division, and guilt. The speaker is "poisoned with the blood of both," a vivid metaphor for how colonialism complicates the notion of self.

Language, a key concern in postcolonial theory, is also crucial in this poem. The speaker confesses his love for the English tongue, a language associated with colonial domination. This attachment is juxtaposed against his African ancestry and the violence done to it. The question "how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" highlights the double bind many postcolonial writers face: using the language of the oppressor to articulate the trauma of the oppressed. The poem critiques the cold rationalism of empire: "statistics justify and scholars seize / The salients of colonial policy." Here, Walcott attacks the dehumanising language of bureaucracy that often conceals or excuses atrocities committed under the guise of order and civilisation. He exposes the moral bankruptcy of colonial logic that treats colonised people as expendable. Walcott also engages with the myth of European superiority. In the image of the "gorilla" fighting the "superman," he challenges the assumption of Western civilisation's moral or intellectual supremacy. The reference to "the white peace contracted by the dead" is bitterly ironic, suggesting that colonial peace is only achievable through massacres and submission.

The speaker's final rhetorical questions, "How can I face such slaughter and be cool? / How can I turn from Africa and live?", convey the psychological toll of divided loyalty. He cannot disavow either side of his heritage without feeling a sense of betrayal. This reflects the broader postcolonial theme of alienation: the impossibility of belonging wholly to either culture when both are implicated in historical violence.

3.4.5 Major Themes

1. Colonial Violence and Suppression: The poem is a powerful indictment of colonial violence. The British response to the Mau Mau revolt is portrayed as cold and statistical, reducing human lives to numbers. This reflects how colonial regimes often rationalised their brutality.

2. Identity and Hybridity: The speaker's inner turmoil reflects the complex identity of many postcolonial subjects. His ancestry ties him to Africa, but his education and literary influences are British. This results in a painful sense of displacement.

3. Language and Belonging: Language becomes a central symbol in the poem. The speaker loves the English tongue, yet it is also the language of the oppressor. This duality reflects the broader postcolonial struggle of writing in the coloniser's language.

4. Nature and Brutality: The African landscape is portrayed as majestic yet violated. Nature is used as a backdrop to highlight the horror of human violence. The contrast between beauty and bloodshed is a recurring motif.

5. Moral Ambiguity and Guilt: Walcott does not present clear moral binaries. Both coloniser and colonised are shown to commit atrocities. The speaker's guilt is profound, reflecting the psychological damage inflicted by divided heritage.

6. Alienation and Division: The speaker is torn "to the vein," a visceral image that conveys deep internal conflict. He belongs fully to neither culture, making him a symbol of postcolonial alienation.

3.4.6 Literary Devices

1. *Imagery*

Walcott's use of vivid imagery creates strong visual impressions and emotional responses. Examples include:

- "A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt / Of Africa" – personifies Africa as a living creature.
- "Corpses are scattered through a paradise" – stark juxtaposition of beauty and death.
- "Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum" – connects war to ritual and death.

2. *Metaphor*

- "Divided to the vein" – reflects the deep-rooted internal conflict caused by mixed heritage.
- "The gorilla wrestles with the superman" – symbolises the struggle between native resistance and colonial power.

3. *Irony*

- "White peace contracted by the dead" – peace is obtained through bloodshed, a critique of colonial justification.
- "Savages, expendable as Jews" – biting irony that equates the dehumanisation of colonised Africans with Holocaust victims.

4. *Symbolism*

- Africa: ancestral identity and suffering.
- English tongue: cultural inheritance and colonial oppression.
- Worm, carrion: decay, death, and the permanence of colonial violence.

5. *Alliteration and Assonance*

Used throughout the poem to add musicality and enhance its emotional and lyrical effect. For example:

- "Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt."

6. *Personification*

"Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries" – gives authority and voice to death itself, underscoring the brutality of war.

Recap

- The poem addresses the brutality of British colonialism during the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya.
- It juxtaposes Africa's natural beauty with the violence and devastation caused by imperial conflict.
- Walcott critiques both the colonisers and the Mau Mau rebels, refusing to romanticise either side.
- The speaker experiences an intense inner conflict due to his mixed African and European heritage.
- The poem highlights the postcolonial theme of hybrid identity and the emotional toll of divided loyalty.

- Walcott explores the dehumanising language of colonialism: “statistics justify and scholars seize.”
- Language is central to the poem: the speaker loves the English language but is pained by its imperial associations.
- Literary devices such as metaphor, irony, imagery, and personification enrich the poem’s emotional and thematic depth.
- The poem ends in unresolved anguish, with rhetorical questions expressing the speaker’s moral paralysis.
- “A Far Cry from Africa” is a key postcolonial text that explores identity, violence, guilt, and belonging in the aftermath of empire.

Objective Questions

1. What is the historical background of the poem?
2. What internal conflict does the speaker experience?
3. What does "divided to the vein" mean?
4. What is the poem’s tone?
5. What role does nature play in the poem?
6. How does the poem reflect postcolonial concerns?
7. What literary device is used in "statistics justify mass murder"?
8. What is the meaning of the title "A Far Cry from Africa"?
9. Why does the speaker feel poisoned?
10. What is the final message of the poem?

Answers

1. The Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya
2. Division between African ancestry and British culture.
3. Deep inner conflict about identity and belonging.
4. Reflective, anguished, conflicted.
5. A contrast to human violence; a symbol of desecration.
6. It critiques colonial violence and explores hybrid identity.
7. Irony.
8. Emotional and cultural distance; longing and alienation.
9. He carries the blood and guilt of both coloniser and colonised.
10. The tragic impossibility of reconciling split identities.

Assignments

1. Explore the representation of violence in "A Far Cry from Africa." How does Walcott use imagery to convey brutality?
2. Discuss how the poem portrays the conflict between personal identity and colonial history.
3. Analyse the significance of language in the poem. Why does the speaker feel conflicted about the English tongue?
4. How does Walcott convey the theme of moral ambiguity in the poem?
5. What does the poem suggest about the psychological impact of colonisation on mixed-heritage individuals?

Suggested Reading

1. Walcott, Derek. *Collected Poems 1948–1984*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986.
2. Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, 1952.
3. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
4. Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back*. Routledge, 1989.
5. Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1994.

Unit 5

Journey to the Interior

- Margaret Atwood

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to,

- understand the postcolonial undertones of the poem
- analyse the poet's internal conflict regarding identity
- explore the poem's use of violent imagery and historical references
- interpret the tone, mood, and rhetorical devices used in the poem

Prerequisites

Margaret Atwood's "Journey to the Interior" is a profound exploration of the human psyche, where the external world and the internal mind converge in a complex, symbolic journey. Atwood uses the metaphor of a physical journey to describe the mental and emotional experience of going deep into one's consciousness. The poem's rhetorical structure reflects the tension between the known and the unknown, the conscious and the unconscious, as the speaker moves deeper into an internal landscape full of challenges and contradictions.

Through her carefully crafted language and vivid imagery, Atwood creates a sense of disorientation, as if the speaker is taking the readers through an unfamiliar, almost surreal terrain. This journey is not only of simple self-reflection, but also a confrontation with the complexities of identity, memory, and the human condition. The speaker's journey is loaded with uncertainty, embodying the difficulty of truly knowing oneself and the vast, often impenetrable, nature of the mind.

Atwood's use of rhetorical devices such as symbolism and ambiguity encourages readers to interpret the journey not just as a personal odyssey, but as a universal experience. "Journey to the Interior" is a meditation on the landscapes of the mind, offering insight into the delicate interplay between perception, self-awareness, and the human struggle for meaning.

Key words

Landscape, self-discovery, inner journey, survival, identity, mindscape

3.5.1 About the Poet

Margaret Atwood (born 1939) is a celebrated Canadian author known for her fiction, poetry, and feminist perspective. Best recognised for her dystopian novel The Handmaid's Tale (1985), Atwood has explored themes of power, gender, identity, and survival throughout her career. Raised between urban Toronto and the wilds of northern Canada, she began writing at a young age and later studied at the University of Toronto and Radcliffe College. Her novels, such as The Edible Woman, Alias Grace, The Blind Assassin, and The Testaments, a Booker Prize-winning sequel to The Handmaid's Tale, often centre on complex female protagonists navigating oppressive or surreal worlds. She is also the author of the speculative MaddAddam trilogy, the Shakespeare-inspired Hag-Seed, and numerous poetry collections, including Dearly and Paper Boat. In addition to short stories, Atwood has written influential nonfiction works, such as Negotiating with the Dead and Payback, and contributed to Canadian culture through librettos, radio scripts, and editorial work. Widely regarded as one of Canada's greatest literary voices, her work continues to engage with urgent global themes through a distinctively sharp and poetic lens.

3.5.2 About the Poem

In her poem "Journey to the Interior," Atwood embarks on an introspective exploration of the human mind, using the metaphor of a physical journey to represent the psychological and emotional experience of self-discovery. The poem is steeped in ambiguity, drawing the reader into a landscape where the boundaries between the external world and inner consciousness become blurred. Atwood's rhetorical use of clear, often unsettling imagery reflects the disorienting nature of confronting one's own psyche. As the speaker undertakes a journey to this interior landscape, the poem captures the complexities of the mind - its hidden fears, uncertainties, and the fragility of self-awareness.

3.5.3 Summary

Journey to the Interior

There are similarities

There are similarities
I notice: that the hills
which the eyes make flat as a wall, welded
together, open as I move
to let me through; become
endless as prairies; that the trees
grow spindly, have their roots
often in swamps; that this is a poor country;
that a cliff is not known
as rough except by hand, and is
therefore inaccessible.

In the first part from "Journey to the Interior," Margaret Atwood reflects on the disorienting and unpredictable nature of the landscape. The speaker observes that the natural environment, which may appear flat and uniform at first glance, is full of complexity, with hills that "open" as one moves through them and trees that grow in difficult, swampy conditions. This description highlights the tension between surface appearances and deeper, often hidden realities, a concept that can be examined through a postcolonial lens.

The phrase "this is a poor country" can be seen as a subtle critique of the colonial mind-

set, which often characterised colonised lands as "wild" or "uncivilised." Atwood's depiction of the landscape challenges this notion, presenting it as a place of resilience and complexity rather than mere emptiness or chaos. The "inaccessibility" of the cliff, only known "by hand," further suggests that this land cannot be easily dominated or understood by outsiders, alluding to the failure of colonial powers to truly master the territories they sought to control. The natural world in this stanza resists simplification, explaining the ways in which colonised peoples and cultures often resist attempts at colonial categorisation or control.

Mostly

that travel is not the easy going

from point to point, a dotted
line on a map, location
plotted on a square surface
but that I move surrounded by a tangle
of branches, a net of air and alternate
light and dark, at all times;
that there are no destinations
apart from this.

In this stanza, Margaret Atwood contrasts the conventional, simplified view of travel as a straightforward journey between points on a map with the complex, disorienting reality of the journey described. The speaker reflects on the experience of being surrounded by a "tangle of branches" and "a net of air," suggesting that the terrain is not easily passable or reducible to a series of coordinates. This can be interpreted through a postcolonial lens as a critique of Western cartographic practices, which often sought to impose order, control, and ownership over colonised landscapes by mapping them in neat, linear ways.

The metaphor of "alternate light and dark" emphasises the unpredictable, fragmented nature of the journey, hinting at the complexity and resistance of lands that colonial powers sought to conquer. By stating, "there are no destinations apart from this," the speaker also suggests that the journey itself, with its ambiguity and challenge, is the ultimate reality, rejecting the colonial notion of a final, predetermined goal. This can be read as a rejection of colonial ideologies that sought to impose a singular, Eurocentric narrative on diverse, multifaceted cultures and landscapes. The stanza emphasises the inherent resistance of land and identity to such reductive approaches.

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

some have returned safely.

In this part from "Journey to the Interior," Margaret Atwood reflects on the complexities and disorienting aspects of the journey, emphasising the "lack of reliable charts" and the "distraction of small details." The speaker's struggle with these seemingly insignificant but unsettling details, like a misplaced shoe or a sentence crossing their path, signifies the confusion and fragmented nature of both physical and mental landscapes. From a postcolonial perspective, this disorientation can be seen as a commentary on the colonial experience, where colonisers often attempted to map and impose order on lands that were complex and multifaceted, rejecting the diversity of indigenous knowledge and experience.

The line "many have been here, but only some have returned safely" introduces the idea of danger, suggesting that the journey through

unfamiliar or colonised lands is fraught with risk and unpredictability. This could be a metaphor for the violence and trauma experienced by colonised peoples, where many attempted to pass through or survive under colonial rule, but not all made it out unharmed. The speaker's questioning whether they have "been walking in circles again" reflects the cyclical nature of colonial history, where attempts to understand or control the land are often repeated without success, highlighting the persistent resistance of both the land and its people.

A compass is useless; also
trying to take directions
from the movements of the sun,
which are erratic;
and words here are as pointless
as calling in a vacant wilderness.
Whatever I do I must
keep my head. I know
it is easier for me to lose my way
forever here than in other landscapes.

In this stanza, Margaret Atwood conveys a sense of disorientation and futility, where conventional methods of navigation, such as a compass or the movement of the sun, are useless. The land described here is unpredictable and refuses to be tamed or controlled, reflecting a postcolonial critique of colonial powers' efforts to dominate and map foreign territories. The speaker's realisation that "words here are as pointless / as calling in a vacant wilderness" suggests the limitations of language and Western systems of control when faced with landscapes and cultures that do not conform to colonial frameworks.

The idea of "losing my way forever" highlights the disconnection between colonisers' attempts to impose their understanding of land and the reality of indigenous spaces, which cannot be fully grasped or controlled through colonial tools like maps or language. The speaker's awareness of the difficulty of navigating this "landscape" parallels the colonial struggle to impose order and dominance on territories and people that resist such impositions. This final part emphasises the deep, inherent complexity of colonised spaces, suggesting that the true essence of these lands cannot be reduced to Western frameworks of knowledge or control.

3.5.4 Analysis

"Journey to the Interior" by Margaret Atwood is a deeply contemplative poem that explores the relationship between the speaker and the natural world, blending both psychological and physical landscapes. The poem depicts a journey through an unfamiliar and rugged terrain, which echoes the complexities of the human mind. Atwood uses vivid imagery and metaphor to highlight a sense of disorientation, confusion, and resistance, which can be interpreted through a postcolonial lens as a critique of colonial attitudes toward land, nature, and identity.

The poem begins with the speaker sighting similarities between the landscape and the mind, drawing attention to the way the hills and trees "open" and become "endless as prairies." This idea of the land shifting and transforming as the speaker moves through it hints at the resistance of nature to be fixed or easily understood. This can be seen as a postcolonial critique of the Western imperialist approach, which sought to map, categorise, and control unfamiliar territories. The "poor country" with its "spindly trees" and "swamps" evokes a colonial perception of lands and peoples as "uncivilised," yet Atwood challenges this by portraying the land as complex and not easily reducible to Western ideals of order and control.

The lack of reliable maps and the presence of "small details" that distract the speaker further underscore the failure of colonial methods to make sense of a landscape that cannot be neatly categorised. The reference to "the lack of

reliable charts" echoes the colonial mindset of attempting to control and dominate spaces through mapping and navigation, which oversimplifies the diverse and multifaceted nature of indigenous territories. The "danger" mentioned in the poem is another allusion to the peril faced by colonisers who attempted to conquer lands without understanding them. The idea that "many have been here, but only some have returned safely" reflects the historical violence and trauma associated with colonisation, where many indigenous people resisted, fought, or suffered under colonial rule.

Atwood also critiques the limitations of language and colonial discourse in the poem: "words here are as pointless / as calling in a vacant wilderness." This highlights the idea that colonial powers, with their Western languages and systems of knowledge, fail to engage meaningfully with the complexities of the land and people they seek to dominate.

"Journey to the Interior" can be seen as a postcolonial exploration of the failure of colonial frameworks to fully comprehend and control both the land and its people. Atwood's poem emphasises the unpredictable, multifaceted nature of the environment, suggesting that both nature and identity resist colonial simplifications and categorisations. The journey through this "interior" is a metaphor for understanding the deep, complex resistance that colonised lands present to imperialist attempts at domination.

3.5.5 Major Themes

1. The Complexity of Land and Identity

Atwood portrays the landscape as unpredictable, resistant to being mapped or controlled. The "tangle of branches" and "a net of air and alternate light and dark" illustrate a land that cannot be neatly categorised or understood through traditional Western colonial frameworks. This reflects the postcolonial idea that colonised spaces, whether geographical or cultural, are complex and multifaceted, resisting the simplistic and reductive perspectives of colonial powers.

2. The Failure of Colonial Mapping and Control

The speaker's difficulty with "the lack of reliable charts" and the "uselessness" of traditional tools like a compass or the movement of the sun echoes the failure of colonial powers to fully understand and dominate the lands they colonised. Western mapping and navigation systems, which aimed to impose order and control over territories, are shown to be inadequate in the face of a landscape that resists such impositions. This theme critiques the colonial mindset of reducing diverse, complex lands to mere coordinates and maps.

3. Disorientation and Alienation

The poem reflects a sense of disorientation, as the speaker is lost in both the physical and mental landscapes. This disorientation signifies the alienation experienced by both colonisers and colonised peoples. Colonised spaces often challenge the identity and authority of colonial powers, as shown in the speaker's confusion as to whether they have been "walking in circles again." This theme can be seen as a metaphor for the cyclical nature of colonialism, where attempts to control and dominate are often futile and result in repetition and confusion.

4. The Limits of Language and Colonial Discourse

Atwood critiques the limitations of language in conveying meaning in a land that resists conventional understanding. The line "words here are as pointless / as calling in a vacant wilderness" suggests that language, particularly the language of colonial discourse, is insufficient for engaging with the complexity and richness of the land. Postcolonial theory often emphasises the way colonial languages impose meanings on indigenous cultures, stripping them of their complexity and richness. Atwood's poem highlights how language

can fail to capture the true essence of a place that is outside colonial frameworks.

5. *The Danger of Colonisation*

The poem's reference to "the danger" faced by those who travel through this landscape speaks to the historical violence and trauma associated with colonisation. The speaker reflects on how "many have been here, but only some have returned safely," alluding to the risks faced by both colonisers and colonised people in the process of colonisation. This can be interpreted as a metaphor for the physical and cultural destruction that often accompanies colonisation, where many lives and cultures were lost or irrevocably damaged.

6. *Resistance to Colonial Domination*

The overall tone of the poem suggests a resistance to colonial domination, particularly in the way the land resists being controlled or understood through colonial tools like mapping and language. The speaker's journey through this "interior" is a metaphor for the struggle to navigate colonised spaces, both externally and internally. Postcolonial themes of resistance are embedded in the idea that indigenous lands, cultures, and identities cannot be fully assimilated into colonial systems. The land is portrayed as a powerful force that remains outside the control of colonial powers, emphasising the resilience and resistance of colonised peoples and territories.

3.5.6 Literary Devices

1. *Metaphor*

- "The hills / which the eyes make flat as a wall": The hills are metaphorically described as a wall, emphasising how human perception simplifies complex landscapes. This metaphor highlights the limited way people often view or categorise unfamiliar terrains, which can also be seen as a critique of colonial perspectives on land.
- "A tangle of branches, a net of air and alternate light and dark": The environment is likened to a net, suggesting a sense of entanglement and complexity that reflects the mental and emotional state of the speaker. This can be interpreted as representing the internal struggle and the confusion experienced in both personal and postcolonial journeys.

2. *Imagery*

- Atwood uses rich visual imagery throughout the poem to convey the complexity of the landscape. For example, "spindly trees," "lucent white mushrooms," and "fallen log" create a vivid picture of the natural world, highlighting its wild, untamed qualities. The imagery reinforces the idea of the land as something that cannot be easily understood or controlled, resisting colonial attempts to categorise it.

3. *Symbolism*

- The compass: The compass in the poem symbolises the tools of colonial navigation and control. Its "uselessness" points to the failure of colonial powers to truly understand or dominate the lands they sought to colonise, which could not be mapped or controlled through colonial methods.
- The land itself: The land functions as a symbol of resistance, both physical and psychological. It resists being tamed or understood by colonial frameworks, symbolising the resilience of indigenous cultures and territories in the face of colonisation.

4. *Personification*

- "A cliff is not known / as rough except by hand": The cliff is given human-like qualities, as it is "known" and can be "rough," emphasising the

tactile, intimate interaction required to understand the landscape. This personification highlights how the land can only be understood through direct, physical engagement, not through abstract colonial tools like maps.

5. *Irony*

- The poem contains a subtle irony in the idea that the speaker is lost and unable to navigate, yet this journey is also one of personal and intellectual discovery. The irony lies in the fact that, despite the disorientation, the speaker's journey is deeply reflective and introspective, challenging the notion that a "clear path" is always preferable.

Recap

- Theme of Disorientation: The poem explores the confusion and disorientation of navigating an unknown and unpredictable landscape, both physically and mentally.
- Metaphor of the Landscape: The land is depicted as complex and resistant to being easily understood or controlled, symbolising the psychological journey of the speaker.
- Postcolonial Critique: The poem critiques colonial attitudes toward land and space, highlighting how colonisers sought to simplify and map complex, unfamiliar territories.
- The Ineffectiveness of Conventional Tools: The compass and the sun, which are typically used for navigation, are deemed "useless," reflecting the failure of colonial powers to control the land and its people through Western methods.
- Resistance of the Land: The land resists the imposition of colonial frameworks, echoing the way indigenous lands and cultures resist colonial domination.
- Importance of the Journey: The speaker emphasises the journey itself, rather than a clear destination, suggesting that meaning is found in the experience, not in the final goal.
- Symbolism of the Compass: The compass symbolises colonial attempts to map and control territory, but its uselessness emphasises the inadequacy of these methods in the face of complex, resistant landscapes.
- Personification of the Land: The land is described as "rough except by hand," giving it human-like qualities and highlighting the need for direct, intimate interaction with the land to understand it.
- Critique of Colonial Mapping: The "lack of reliable charts" reflects the colonial obsession with mapping, which oversimplifies complex territories and cultures.
- Distraction of Small Details: The poem references seemingly insignificant details (like a misplaced shoe or a fallen log) to emphasise the complexities and distractions of navigating both the physical and psychological landscape.

- Alienation and Confusion: The speaker experiences alienation, both from the land and from their own sense of direction, mirroring the disconnection felt by colonised peoples who are subjected to foreign systems of control.
- Postcolonial Theme of Cultural Erasure: The poem reflects the difficulties colonisers face when they attempt to "understand" or "dominate" cultures and territories without respecting their inherent complexity.
- Cyclical Nature of the Journey: The speaker questions whether they have been "walking in circles again," symbolising the repetitive nature of colonial history and the challenges of breaking free from colonial domination.
- Inaccessibility of the Land: The speaker's awareness that the landscape is difficult to navigate suggests the inherent resistance of both land and identity to colonial domination.
- The Danger of Colonisation: The line "many have been here, but only some have returned safely" alludes to the historical dangers and violence of colonisation, where many indigenous people suffered under colonial rule, and only a few survived intact.

Objective Questions

1. Who is the poet of "Journey to the Interior"?
2. What symbolic tool does the poet declare as useless?
3. What kind of journey is central to the poem's theme?
4. What type of imagery dominates the poem?
5. What landscape metaphorically represents the mind?
6. What emotion is associated with the speaker's journey?
7. What traditional navigation method is rendered ineffective?
8. Which literary device gives the landscape human traits?
9. What genre of critique is embedded in the poem's themes?
10. What does the speaker emphasize more than destination?

Answers

1. Atwood
2. Compass
3. Interior
4. Violent
5. Landscape

6. Disorientation
7. Sun
8. Personification
9. Postcolonial
10. Journey

Assignments

1. How does “Journey to the Interiors” explore the psychological and cultural impact of colonialism on the individual, particularly in relation to the harsh Canadian landscape?
2. In what ways does Atwood’s portrayal of the landscape in “Journey to the Interiors” reflect postcolonial concerns about the tension between the colonised land and the coloniser’s view of it? Discuss how the speaker’s journey symbolises a larger post-colonial experience.
3. Examine the role of identity and displacement in “Journey to the Interiors”. How does the speaker’s sense of self evolve in the face of a vast, indifferent, and colonised environment?
4. Discuss the symbolism of the "interior" in Atwood’s poem. How can it be interpreted as a metaphor for the post-colonial struggle to reclaim a lost or suppressed cultural identity?
5. How does “Journey to the Interiors” critique the Western, colonial narrative of nature and wilderness, and what does this critique suggest about the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised land?

Suggested Reading

1. Atwood, Margaret. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. House of Anansi Press, 1970.
2. Gergen, Kenneth J., and Mary M. Gergen. *Narrative and the Self: Post-Colonial Perspectives*. Sage Publications, 2003.
3. Miller, J. R. *The Native in Canadian Literature*. University of Toronto Press, 2009.
4. McLeod, John. *Post-Colonialism: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge, 2000.
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BLOCK - 04

Drama

Unit 1

The Lion and the Jewel

-Wole Soyinka

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to,

- analyse Soyinka's blending of Yoruba and European theatrical traditions
- evaluate the play's critique of colonial and post-colonial power structures
- interpret the symbolic significance of dance and ritual in the drama
- compare traditional and modern gender roles in Yoruba society
- assess Soyinka's use of satire to expose cultural contradictions.

Prerequisites

Before reading *The Lion and the Jewel*, learners will benefit from a solid grounding in post-colonial literature, Yoruba culture, theatre practice and mid-century Nigerian history. Familiarity with writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o clarifies shared concerns about cultural identity, colonial legacies, and forms of resistance, while background knowledge of Nigeria's approach to independence in 1960 explains the urgent debates between modernisation and tradition that shape Soyinka's satire. Exploring Yoruba society its gender roles, bride-price custom, oral storytelling, and pantheon of deities helps readers see why a water pot, a stamp machine, or a sly proverb carries more weight than it first appears.

An introduction to theatrical conventions is equally useful. Soyinka fuses a three-part European dramatic frame with Yoruba performance techniques such as mime, communal dance, drumming, and direct audience address. Recognising these devices alongside a readiness to spot satire, irony, symbolism, and the quick pivot from comic surface to serious critique will sharpen analysis of Lakunle's stiff English speeches or Baroka's earthy proverbial wit. Learners should also revise key concepts from gender studies--agency, objectification, patriarchy, polygamy, because Sidi's rise and submission and Sadiku's fleeting triumph depend on how power moves between sexes within the village and beyond.

Close attention to language is also important. Soyinka braids formal English, everyday pidgin, and Yoruba idiom, allowing words themselves to signal status and intention. Lakunle's textbook phrases float like fragile china, whereas Baroka's sayings root themselves in soil and history. By approaching the play with this mixture of literary awareness, cultural insight, and critical vocabulary, students can move past surface comedy into a fuller discussion of how tradition, modernity, and creative resilience meet and spar on the Ilujinle stage.

Key words

Yoruba Cosmology, Colonialism, Tradition, Modernity, Satire, Gender

Discussion

4.1.1.About the Playwright

Fig.4.1.1 Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka was born on 13 July 1934 in the town of Abeokuta, a rocky plateau not far from Ibadan in what was then Britain's colony of Nigeria. Today he is known across the world as Wole Soyinka, the first African writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, an outspoken public voice, and a dramatist whose work blends the stage traditions of ancient Greece, Shakespearean England and his own Yoruba homeland. His long life runs like a river through key moments of West African history: British rule, the rush to independence, the tragedy of civil war, military dictatorships, fragile republics and the struggle for genuine democracy. Over the same years Soyinka, who still speaks and writes at ninety, has produced a body of plays, poems, novels, memoirs and essays that stand among the vital records of the post-colonial world.

Soyinka's early schooling took place at Government College, Ibadan, an elite institution modelled on English public schools. There he showed a taste for theatre, editing a student magazine and staging short sketches drawn from folklore. In 1954 he left for the University of Leeds, where he plunged into the city's vibrant theatre scene and read the Irish modernists, especially J. M. Synge, whose wild language and tragic humour struck a chord. Soyinka's own writing in those years began to mix the lean dramatic speech of European modern drama with the masks, drums and chants of Yoruba festival. At the Royal Court Theatre in London he worked as a reader and dramaturg, polishing early versions of *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel*.

The Rockefeller Foundation sent him home in 1960, the very year Nigeria gained independence. Fired by the hope that art could help shape a new nation, Soyinka formed a trav-

elling troupe, the 1960 Masks, later renamed the Orisun Theatre. Their opening season included *The Lion and the Jewel*, a sparkling village comedy whose clash between a vain western-trained schoolteacher and a wily traditional chief already summed up the broader tension in modern Africa between imported values and indigenous ways. The play's language is English, but its rhythm echoes Yoruba proverbs, praise songs and dance. Sidi, the "jewel" of the title, moves with the grace of a festival goddess, while the chorus of drummers punctuates each scene.

From that point Soyinka wrote steadily for the stage: satirical farces such as *The Trials of Brother Jero*, harsh political dramas like *Kongi's Harvest*, dense metaphysical quests such as *The Road*, and masterpieces of tragic ritual, above all *Death and the King's Horseman*. In each he drew on Yoruba cosmology. The God Ogun, lord of iron and threshold spaces, became a symbol of the artist as pathfinder, willing to shed blood to open a road between worlds. Soyinka's theatre also carries clear marks of his classical reading: the swift dialogue of Aristophanes, the choric laments of Aeschylus, the biting social scorn of Brecht, yet reshaped by village mime, masking and communal dance.

Nigeria's promise of freedom soon soured. In 1965 Soyinka protested against sham elections by seizing a radio station in Ibadan and substituting his own call for honest counts. Though the charge of broadcasting false results was later dropped, the act branded him a rebel. Two years later the Biafran War broke out. Soyinka tried to mediate, meeting rebel leaders and pressing both sides for a ceasefire. The federal government jailed him without trial. He spent twenty-seven months in solitary confinement, filling margins of smuggled books and scraps of toilet paper with poems and reflections later gathered in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* and *The Man Died*. That long ordeal fixed themes that run through his later work: the loneliness of dissent, the thin line between sanity and despair, the moral duty to speak against tyranny.

After his release in 1969 he left Nigeria for a spell of self-chosen exile, lecturing at Sheffield, Cambridge and Yale, and editing the pan-African magazine *Transition*. He returned in 1975, helped to find the Department of Dramatic Arts at the University of Ife and threw himself into civic debate. The 1980s saw searing stage pieces, *A Play of Giants* and *Requiem for a Futurologist*, where dictators strut like inflated puppets under the glare of international hypocrisy. In 1986 came his Nobel Prize, awarded, said the Swedish Academy, for a poetic drama that in widening our horizons speaks for the whole human condition. The honour did not shelter him from danger. Under General Sani Abacha's brutal junta in the 1990s, Soyinka again fled into exile and was sentenced to death in absentia for "treasonable felony." From London and later the United States he toured, lectured and wrote blistering essays, most famously *The Open Sore of a Continent*, a work that charts how the annulled election of 12 June 1993 turned Nigeria into, in his words, "a garrison of slaves." When Abacha died in 1998 Soyinka at once returned, vowing to help rebuild civic space. His later memoir, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, traces that return and warns that freedom must be guarded day by day.

Even in his eighties and nineties Soyinka kept writing. *Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth*, published in 2021, is a sprawling dark satire on graft and false piety in an oil-rich nation oddly like contemporary Nigeria. In 2023 he issued *Selected Poems 1965-2022*, revising youthful pieces and adding new elegies for comrades lost. He has spoken across campuses about climate change, the migrant crisis and

threats to free speech. With younger Nigerian authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie he debated the shape of future African writing, praising their global reach yet urging them never to forget local tongues and rituals. Throughout all these phases, the pulse of Yoruba heritage has never left his art. The myths of Orun and Aiye, heaven and earth; the masked *egungun* who dance the dead back into memory; the marketplace wit of Lagos street hawkers; even the palm-wine chatter at roadside joints, all feed his scenes. Soyinka rejects simple labels like "traditional" or "modern." He calls himself a hunter of human stories, ready to borrow any tool that works, whether a talking drum or a Greek chorus. At the same time he resists the romanticism of Negritude that paraded African essence before European gaze. "The tiger does not proclaim his tigritude," he quipped, "he pounces." Post-colonial critics find in Soyinka's plays sharp questions about national identity, the corruption that followed flag independence and the lingering weight of colonial borders. While many African writers write in bitterness about Europe, Soyinka often turns his anger inward, at local strongmen who, he argues, have used the excuse of foreign exploitation to mask their own greed. Yet colonial history shapes his contrasts: the English-speaking, bicycle-riding Lakunle in *The Lion and the Jewel* yearns to drag his village into a future defined by European schooling, even as the chief Baroka manipulates that dream to keep power in old hands. *The Lion and the Jewel*, first staged in Ibadan in 1959 and still one of Soyinka's most performed plays, offers a perfect open door to all these themes and styles. Set in the fictive village of Ilujinle over a single day, it pits Lakunle's eager modernism against Baroka's crafty traditionalism, while the beautiful Sidi chooses her own path between them. The plot seems slight, a comic race for a bride, yet within its dance sequences, mime and songs lie deep debates about change, gender, authority and the seductive image. The play's mixture of English dialogue, Yoruba chants, pantomime and drumming shows in compact form the hybrid stage language Soyinka has made his own.

Reading *The Lion and the Jewel* after this brief journey through Soyinka's life, we may hear fresh echoes. Lakunle's faith in colonial schooling mirrors Soyinka's time in Leeds; Baroka's masquerade points back to Ogun's dual nature; Sidi's final choice suggests resilience beyond extreme. And behind the laughter hovers the playwright's lifelong conviction that drama, rooted in living ritual, can unmask vanity, free the imagination and perhaps guide a community toward a juster future.

4.1.2. Yoruba Culture

Fig 4.1.2 Yoruba community

The Yoruba people live mainly in south-western Nigeria, though their towns and villages also stretch into neighbouring Benin and Togo. With a population of more than thirty million they form one of Africa's largest cultural groups, yet they share a sense of identity that rests on common language, myths of origin, religious ideas and a long history of city-states linked by trade. Understanding Yoruba life helps a reader step inside Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel* because every scene, song and gesture in that comedy grows from Yoruba custom.

Yoruba oral tradition tells that the first hu-

mans came forth at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ when the god Ọbàtálá moulded clay figures and the sky god Olódùmarè breathed life into them. Another tale says that the deity Ọ̀rúnmìlà lowered a chain from heaven so that Odùduwà could climb down and create dry land. Whatever version one hears, Ilé-Ifẹ̀ stands as the spiritual heart of the people, a city where earth and sky once touched. From there, according to legend, Odùduwà's children set out to found new kingdoms. They became royal ancestors of towns such as Ọ̀yọ́, Ìjẹ̀bú and Ìlọrin. Each town retained its own oba or king and a council of chiefs, so political life took the form of many small realms rather than one empire. This pattern of independent yet related communities shape the village of Ilujinlé in Soyinka's play. Baroka, the Bale or local chief, rules through personal authority and cunning more than distant bureaucracy, echoing the real history of Yoruba chieftaincy.

Traditional Yoruba religion centres on a supreme but remote creator and a host of orìṣà, lesser deities who manage natural forces and human concerns. Among them are Ògún, lord of iron and the road, Ṣàngó, spirit of thunder, Òṣun, gracious river goddess, and Èṣù, the trickster who carries messages between worlds. Devotees honour these beings through drumming, dance, masks and sacrifice. The sacred is not locked in temples; it thrums in daily life. Masks transform dancers into spirits during festivals. Drums speak tonal phrases of the Yoruba language so that a beat can utter praise or rebuke. In The Lion and the Jewel drums punctuate the action, and the mime sequences where villagers re-enact a past event recall masquerade drama seen at harvest feasts.

Yoruba society organises itself through extended families called ìdílẹ̀ and age-grade associations. Status comes from seniority, achieved skill and service to the community rather than from rigid caste. Women trade in open markets and may rise to the influential post of ìyálọ́jà, the market mother, while men handle farming or craft guilds that trace patronage to Ògún or other orìṣà. Education once began at home where children learned proverbs, praise poetry and the talking drum. With colonial rule came mission schools that offered literacy in English and Western subjects. This meeting of systems stands at the centre of Soyinka's comedy: the schoolteacher Lakunle quotes books and despises bride-price as "savage," whereas the village follows time-honoured marriage rites. Their quarrel captures a larger clash between imported modernity and inherited customs.

Yoruba aesthetics value a balance of clarity and mystery. Carved doors, beaded crowns and talking drums all carry complex symbolism yet must also please the eye or ear. Poetry, whether chanted by a hunter or spoken by a court praise-singer, relies on dense metaphor, playful irony and swift tonal changes. The same taste guides theatrical performance. Actors switch masks and roles, musicians mirror speech patterns so closely that a drummer can recite lineage praises without words, and the audience responds, blurring the line between watchers and players. Soyinka adapts these traits through comic mime, call-and-response songs and the constant presence of onlookers who join the story, such as the village girls who tease Sidi while admiring her beauty.

Time in Yoruba thought is cyclical as well as linear. The spirits of ancestors return during egúngún festivals when masked dancers swirl through the streets, reaffirming ties between the living and the dead. Ceremonies mark transitions of life -- naming, puberty, marriage, elderhood -- underlining a sense that each phase belongs to a wider rhythm. *The Lion and the Jewel* unfolds over one day, morning to moonrise, yet within that span it enacts the cycle of

courtship, rivalry and union, suggesting that social patterns repeat across generations.

Humour enjoys high respect as a teaching tool. The trickster Èṣù shows that wit can expose vanity. Village storytellers relish tales in which proud characters learn humility through comic mishap. Soyinka follows that tradition: Lakunle's lofty speeches collapse under their own weight, and even the cunning Baroka faces mockery before claiming victory. Laughter becomes a vehicle for moral reflection without sour preaching.

Colonial contact changed Yoruba regions from the 1880s onward. British administrators imposed new borders, Christian missions challenged orìṣà worship, and cash crops altered village economies. Yet Yoruba culture proved resilient, blending rather than breaking. Churches adopted drums; markets expanded to sell factory cloth alongside local dye; school graduates still attended ancestral festivals. Soyinka's play, written on the eve of Nigerian independence, captures that moment of tension when futures were open. Should Ilujinlé rush to copy distant cities or adapt its own ways. The drama offers no simple answer but shows that any choice ignores the depth of communal memory at great peril.

Language remains a key bearer of identity. Yoruba is tonal which means pitch can change a word's sense. Proverbs called òwe condense wisdom in vivid images: "A man who carries an elephant on his head should not hunt a cricket with his foot." Such sayings pepper Soyinka's dialogue even when characters speak English, lending them Yoruba cadence and irony. To an audience aware of this double register, Lakunle's plain English often feels thin, whereas Baroka's earthier phrases ring with layered meaning.

Finally, the Yoruba worldview recognises a porous border between the tangible and the spiritual. Dreams, divination and omen reading guide daily decisions. A village like Ilujinlé would consult the babaláwo priest before planting crops or fixing a wedding date. While The Lion and the Jewel wears the mask of comedy, it hints at unseen forces: Baroka's sudden "impotence" that may be feigned or fated, Sidi's image captured by the stranger's camera as if stealing her āṣẹ, her vital energy. Such moments remind us that behind lively banter lie beliefs about destiny and power that stretch back to Ilé-Ifẹ̀.

Knowing these features of Yoruba culture allows a richer reading of Soyinka's play. Baroka becomes more than a crafty elder; he stands as guardian of social balance and spiritual channels. Lakunle is not merely a fool, but a symbol of a new class torn between admiration of Europe and disregard for living tradition. Sidi shines as the embodiment of beauty celebrated in maiden festivals. The songs, mimes and drumming are not decorative but echo the ritual through which a community tests change and reaffirms itself. As we turn now to The Lion and the Jewel, we enter not just a village quarrel, but a drama woven from the textures of Yoruba life.

4.1.3.The Lion and the Jewel

Fig 4.1.3 Performance of *The Lion and the Jewel* on stage

First staged in Ibadan in 1959 and later brought to London's Royal Court Theatre, Wole Soy-

inka's comedy *The Lion and the Jewel* unfolds in a single day in the rustic Yoruba village of Ilujinle. From sunrise to moonrise the story follows a lively contest for marriage that mirrors a deeper clash between imported modern ideas and age-old custom. Baroka, the wily Bale of the village, carries the nickname "lion" for his strength, cunning and unwillingness to yield his place. Sidi, celebrated as the "jewel," is the radiant village beauty whose recent fame in a traveller's photographs has sharpened her sense of worth. Lakunle, the young schoolteacher taught in colonial classrooms, rejects bride-price, scoffs at village dances and dreams of turning Ilujinle into a model of Western progress. His courtship of Sidi soon collides with Baroka's slower but surer tactics, while Sadiku, the chief's senior wife and matchmaker, plots and gossips on the sidelines. Morning brings teasing flirtation, noon a public dance that re-enacts the coming of the cameraman, and night a final twist in which Baroka's respect for ritual, and his gift for play-acting, triumph over Lakunle's impatient rhetoric. By dawn the next day tradition has reasserted itself, yet Soyinka leaves room for irony: the lion wins the jewel, but the future of the village remains an open question. Through laughter, music and mime, the play invites us to ask how a community might welcome change without losing the pulse of its own heritage.

4.1.3.1 Characters

Sidi, famed as the village belle, is young, spirited and newly conscious of her value after a visiting photographer splashes her image across glossy pages. The attention fans her pride, yet beneath the playful vanity she is still learning how quickly beauty can tip the balance of power.

Lakunle, the only schoolteacher in Ilujinle, returned from the town with Western textbooks and grand notions of progress. He speaks ornate English, dreams of asphalt roads and newspapers, and calls the traditional bride-price barbaric. His idealism is genuine, but his eagerness to lecture others often blinds him to local feeling.

Baroka, Chief and self-styled lion of Ilujinle, rules by patience, charm and an instinct for human weakness. Though past middle age he wrestles, strategises and treats each day as a game he means to win. To him change is welcome only when he can bend it to strengthen tradition and secure his own place.

Sadiku, Baroka's senior wife, acts as matchmaker, informant and occasional conspirator. She delights in gossip, boasts that no secret eludes her, and measures her status by the chief's successes. When she believes she has found a chance to outwit him she cannot resist crowing, yet her loyalty to the household runs deep.

Around these four spin the villagers of Ilujinle - drummers, dancers, wrestlers, elders- whose songs, mimes and laughter turn a private courtship into a public trial of wits between old customs and new ambitions.

4.1.4. Summary

The play explores the value of traditional Yoruba ways vs. European innovations. It has three sections: Morning, Noon and Night and the time taken for the whole action is roughly 24 hours.

Morning to Late Afternoon

The cock crows above Ilujinle, a quiet Yoruba village that stands a little apart from the booming colonial world. Sunlight creeps over mud walls; women drift towards the stream with pots; children practise English spelling outside the new tin-roof school. Wole Soyinka's comedy opens here and finishes here, all inside one single day.

The first meeting – Lakunle and Sidi

Lakunle, the lone schoolteacher of the village, bursts from his doorway with chalk still on his fingers. He rushes down the track and finds Sidi, the acknowledged beauty of Ilujinle, balancing a huge water-pot on her head. Lakunle is twenty-three, thin, excitable, wearing an ill-fitting western suit and a battered straw hat which he calls his "boater." The hat once impressed clerks in Lagos; in Ilujinle it simply looks odd.

"Permit me, my angel," he begs, seizing the pot. "Civilised ladies must not bear loads like pack-animals. In Lagos they roll water home in shining steel pipes!" Sidi only raises an eyebrow. "Teacher, leave my pot. My neck is straighter than your fancy hat. If you spill one more drop, my mother will thrash us both."

A small struggle follows; water slops; hens run squawking. It is the first sign that Lakunle does not quite understand the rhythms of his own village, even though his feelings are genuine.

Books versus Proverbs

They rest in the shade of a giant iroko tree. Lakunle, brushing clay from his sleeves, launches into a flowery proposal:

LAKUNLE: "My love will blaze like the Sun's noon glory. Together we shall ride in motorcars, eat with knives and forks, sit on soft foam cushions, talk about Shakespeare and the BBC."
SIDI: "Fine promises, Teacher, but first go slaughter a goat and pay my bride-price."

This bride-price, an old Yoruba custom, is the sum a man pays to a girl's family, so her worth is recognised. Lakunle objects fiercely: "Buying wives is for savages. A woman is not property, she is a partner." Yet Sidi stands firm. Without that price she would be laughed at in the market as "cheap." Here Soyinka sets the main argument: is modern equality always better than communal honour?

Each time Lakunle quotes a Victorian poem or a Bible text, Sidi slaps it aside with a neat proverb. When he calls her "weaker vessel." she answers, "The firewood-porter knows whose shoulders burn." In these quick exchanges the audience hears two languages: the teacher's imported rhetoric and the girl's earthy realism. Both are comic; both contain truth.

The stranger's magazine

Drums echo from the far end of the square; children rush past waving a glossy book. Sidi grabs it and gasps. There on the front cover is her own face, eyes sparkling, beads glowing in the river light. An itinerant photographer from Lagos had visited weeks earlier, snapping everything in sight. Now the magazine has returned, and Sidi's image fills the centre pages. She dances with delight:

"Look, Lakunle! My beauty has crossed seven seas. The city men will frame me on their walls."

Lower down the same page sits Baroka, Bale (that is, chief) of Ilujinle. But his picture is tiny and comic: he squats beside the village latrine, posed proudly yet ridiculous. Sidi bursts into wicked laughter. "Even the toilet is bigger than the lion!"

Enter Baroka – the living tradition

A gong rings. Villagers bow as Baroka strides into view, strong despite his sixty-odd years. He wears a goat-skin cap, a lion's-tooth necklace and carries a flywhisk made from horse hair. To youngsters he is a relic; to elders he is living continuity. He greets Lakunle in deep Yoruba, but the teacher sticks out a hand for a brisk European shake. Baroka smiles as one might at a child who insists the moon is cheese.

Fig 4.1.4 Yoruba Festival

To entertain their Bale, the youths perform The Dance of the Lost Traveller: a comic mime showing the white photographer's arrival, his shock at naked bathers, his camera flashing, his stumble into the latrine ditch. Masks, rattles, whistles, and improvised dialogue blend together – part traditional festival, part improvised street theatre. Soyinka suggests that real Nigerian drama rises from just such popular roots.

Lakunle at first refuses to join ("I am a man of letters, not a clown"), yet the rhythmic talking drums seize him; soon he is dancing the role of the bewildered stranger, gesturing with an imaginary lens. Sidi laughs, claps and chants: "Oyinbo! Oyibo!" meaning "white man".

When the play-within-the-play ends, Baroka praises the actors but fixes long eyes on Sidi's photograph. "Five moons since last I chose a wife," he murmurs. "Perhaps the gods remind me that a house without new laughter grows cold." His desire sets the central conflict in motion. From this moment three forces compete for the jewel: modern Lakunle, traditional Baroka, and Sidi's own rising pride.

Transition Towards Noon

The sun climbs until the earth glitters. Women pound yam; goats seek shade; palm-wine drips into clay jars. Sidi sits braiding her hair while two friends admire the magazine. They tease her:

GIRL 1: "Soon the city lords will arrive in cars, calling 'Miss Cover Girl!'"

GIRL 2: "Careful, or the Bale will lock you in his palace." **SIDI** (tossing her beads) : "Let him try. This jewel chooses her own chain."

At that very second Sadiku hurries in. She is the eldest of Baroka's wives, respected as first counsellor; age has bent her back a little, but her eyes are bright with cunning good humour.

Sadiku's embassy

She greets Sidi with a theatrical curtsy. "My daughter of the river, blossom of Ilujinle. The lion sends warm breath upon your neck." Sidi snorts. "Then tell him to keep his breath; it stinks of yesterday's fufu."

But Sadiku unfolds her mission: Baroka wishes to take Sidi as his newest bride. He promises silks, servants, coral beads, a whole brass band of praise-singers. Sidi laughs again – louder, mocking the age gap. "Your master's beard is white. I will not sleep beside an old tortoise."

Sadiku changes tactic. "If not for marriage, then come to supper tonight. Roast plantain dripping with honey, pepper soup rich with goat-tail. Even a proud jewel eats, yes?" Sidi hesitates. Prudence fights curiosity.

Jealousy strikes Lakunle

Lakunle appears, puffing. He drags Sidi aside and tells a secret: years ago the British colonial surveyor came to inspect Ilujinle for a possible railway line. Baroka bribed the man with cocoa, beer and a bull, persuading him to divert the track so no train would ever disturb the village peace. "He hates progress!" Lakunle spits. "He will cage you like the track he twisted."

The villagers, overhearing, decide this story deserves another mime. They stage The

Dance of the Surveyor right there in the dust. Children wear paper helmets, carry rulers and mark imaginary lines; Baroka (played by a mischievous teenager) offers gifts, swats away the surveyor's maps and finally drags the tracks aside like rope. Drums boom; laughter shakes the mango leaves. Sidi joins in the ridicule, but something about the lion's crafty strength fascinates her too.

Sadiku pulls her cloak, reminding her of the supper invitation. Sidi smiles slyly. "Tell your master the jewel may shine at his table – for sport." Lakunle protests, begging her not to go, yet Sidi only replies, "If the lion is toothless, why fear his roar?"

Inside Baroka's Compound – Late Afternoon

We move to a wide, cool room half-open to the breeze. Rugs line the floor; hunting trophies hang above; a mechanical contraption of cogs and levers sits in one corner – Baroka's prized stamp-printing press, a novelty he imported to make village postage with heroic images. The Bale reclines on cushions while young wife Ailatu plucks stray hairs from his armpit, an intimate grooming ceremony.

Sadiku enters, bows and reports Sidi's mock refusal. Baroka does not scowl; instead, a playful spark lights his eye. He dismisses Ailatu. Then he whispers to Sadiku that age has struck him with a terrible curse: impotence. "The lion's pole cannot raise the city walls," he sighs melodramatically. He claims he hoped Sidi's vibrant youth might cure him, but alas.

Sadiku gasps, shocked and secretly thrilled. Baroka makes her promise silence, yet the grin he suppresses tells the audience he counts on her gossip. The seed is planted. As Sadiku hurries out, he strokes his beard.

BAROKA (to himself): "Rumour is a clever goat; it goes wherever fodder lies. Let it run."

The lights fade; cicadas begin their evening chirr. Night creeps towards Ilujinle, and the second half of our retelling will begin there, carrying the plot to its final twist, the seduction, the reversal of fates and the wedding dances.

Evening and Night-Time

Evening settles like warm oil upon Ilujinle. Cooking fires glow: drums mutter in the distance; bats wheel above the palm tops. The comedy now gathers speed, for every rumour planted in the afternoon begins to sprout after sunset.

Sadiku's secret dance

Sadiku cannot keep a secret. The moment she slips outside Baroka's compound she races to the village centre, clutching a raffia fan. She looks about, sees no-one, then leaps high and whirls, singing in a cracked but happy voice:

SADIKU "Oh ho, the mighty lion's claws are blunt, The thunder-rod is cold! Sadiku, first wife, you are free at last-- No rival girls will steal his nightly call!"

She mimes a rusted key that cannot enter an invisible lock, then slaps her thighs in glee. The audience recognises her movements as sheer gossip-dance, common in Yoruba street theatre where news is spread through laughter. Yet she has an unexpected watcher: Sidi has drifted near, curious.

Sidi steps from the shadows. "Mother Sadiku, why do you leap like a goat?" Startled, the old woman confesses the truth as she knows it: Baroka is impotent, finished; he begged her not to tell but sorrow burst her lips. She describes the "rusted key" again. Sidi's eyes widen—first with surprise, then with mischief.

SIDI "If the lion truly snores without teeth, Then let the jewel tap his empty jaw."

She decides to attend supper after all, but not to accept a proposal. Instead, she will mock him, prick his vanity, and run home triumphant. Lakunle appears just in time to hear this plan. He claps delightedly: "Yes, humiliate the old fox. Then, dear Sidi, see reason and marry me- for love, not for money." She ignores his final plea but allows him to escort her part-way, for propriety's sake.

Journey to the palace

The path to Baroka's compound is lit by flares stuck into termite mounds. Lakunle lectures Sidi on the evils of polygamy, quoting from missionary tracts. She lets him chatter, for her mind plots the evening's sport. At the big teak door, she halts.

SIDI "Teacher, stop here. The lion invites the jewel alone. If I need rescue, I shall scream your name- Though I doubt your thin arms could beat his wrestlers."

She laughs lightly and slips inside. Lakunle paces outside the wall, chewing his knuckles.

Inside the lion's den

Baroka's private chamber is half workshop, half bedroom. Lamps hang from iron hooks; skins carpet the floor; and in one corner stands the curious stamp-press, wheels gleaming. A young man, the village champion wrestler, grapples with the Bale in friendly contest. Soyinka shows Baroka's vigour: each time the stronger youth lift him, the old chief twists free and slams the lad down, roaring in good humour.

A servant announces Sidi. Baroka releases the wrestler, waves him off, and wipes sweat from his brow. He greets the girl courteously, offering a wooden stool carved with leopard heads. She sits tall, trying to look scornful.

BAROKA "Most radiant one, you're coming sweetens my stew. Taste palm-wine. It is young, like you."

SIDI

"I did not come to drink. I came to see a lion without claws."

BAROKA (brows lifting)

"Ah? Who told you such forest tales? My claws grow daily."

He gestures toward the stamp machine. "See that contraption? Next moon every letter that leaves Ilujinle will bear your face. Traders in Timbuktu, scholars in London, postmen in Lagos, all will lick your beauty before they seal a note."

The flattery surprises Sidi. She circles the press, fingers the metal plate where her portrait is already etched. "Is it true? My image on paper that flies farther than any bird?" Baroka nods, eyes twinkling. He adds that half the revenue from sales will build a new well near her mother's hut. The girl's pride begins to melt into pleasure.

Still she remembers her mission. Squaring her shoulders, she declares, "Stamp or no stamp, I laugh at men who pretend strength yet hide a broken spear." Baroka gives a slow, rumbling chuckle. "Did Sadiku say that? She chatters worse than guineafowl." He draws closer. "Test the spear yourself, little jewel, before you judge."

Soyinka does not write the explicit seduction; he uses gentle innuendo, quick fades, and symbolic props. Baroka calls for drums soft as heartbeats; he unrolls silk cloth printed with railway maps, saying, "Tracks may bend, but they reach their destination." Lights dim. The audience understands the outcome without crude detail.

Pantomime of woman's triumph

While events unfold inside, the village square hosts another improvised show organised by Sadiku. She has gathered young wives to per-

form **"How Three Sisters Plucked a Cock's Feathers."** They mime tying a proud rooster, plucking it bare, and crowing over its defeat. The crowd squeals with laughter. Lakunle watches, convinced Baroka is weeping in disgrace behind his high wall.

Yet even as the final cock-a-doodle rings, Sidi bursts into the clearing. Her hair is loose, her wrapper hastily tied, her eyes shining with complex emotions. She flings herself on Sadiku's lap, half sobbing, half amazed.

SIDI "Mother, your cock is not plucked, it has grown a second comb! The lion's claws are keen, his roar shakes the rafters."

Sadiku gapes. Lakunle stares, confused. Then realisation dawns: Sidi is no longer the untouched jewel. His fury mixes with disappointed hope; yet he tries one last gambit. He proclaims that, despite everything, he will marry her without bride-price, nobly rescuing her damaged reputation.

Sidi's laugh is short and final. "Teacher, you talk of damage? I have ridden a stallion. I will not shuffle behind a scarecrow." She announces she will become Baroka's wife at dawn. Drums strike an exultant note.

Lakunle's comic collapse

The spurned modernist reels. He mutters quotations, "frailty, thy name is woman," "all is vanity", mixing Shakespeare with scripture until none make sense. Suddenly a young dancer, curves swaying in the firelight, passes near. Lakunle's eyes lock on her hips. Without thinking he follows, mesmerised, proving that his appetite is no finer than any villager's. Soyinka ends Lakunle's storyline in gentle mockery: even reformers are human.

Preparation for the wedding

Cockerels crow midnight. Women fetch palm-oil lamps, grind henna, fold new cloth. Sadiku leads Sidi into a small hut where brides are anointed. She rubs coconut oil along the girl's arms, sings ancient fertility chants, and warns her to respect senior wives but never surrender pride.

Outside, drummers practise the **Alarinjo** rhythm that calls a bride from her father's doorway to her husband's bed. Boys erect tall torches; girls plait flower garlands. The stage picture is vibrant, communal, joyous, showing Yoruba marriage as public celebration, not private contract.

Dawn of the new order

Grey light filters across rooftops. Baroka appears, wearing a lion-skin cape saved for special rites. He lifts an ivory horn; its deep note ripples through Ilujinle. Villagers gather. The playwright describes their formation like petals around a calyx, making Sidi the bright centre.

The marriage ceremony in Soyinka's text is brief but symbolic: the groom touches the bride's head with kola-nut; she touches his foot with palm-wine; both actions show balance of authority and nurture. At the climax Sadiku pours a gourd of water in a circle, sealing the union.

BAROKA (low voice only Sidi hears) "Jewelled one, the stamp-press waits. Today your face joins my village, tomorrow perhaps the nation."

SIDI (smiling) "And next day my sons will ride the train you refused—but they will bear your name."

The audience sees that tradition has not crushed progress; rather, Baroka has bent change to his own design. Sidi, too, has shifted: from carefree girl to woman who negotiates pride, power and pleasure. Soyinka leaves judgement open: who truly wins? Perhaps Yoruba culture itself, flexible enough to absorb the new while guarding the old.

Final tableau

Flutes whirl, talking drums chatter cascading phrases. Men toss raffia balls; women sway in flowing wrappers patterned like river waves. At stage-front Lakunle re-appears, still clutching his grammar book but now grinning sheepishly as he dances behind the same curvy maiden who dazzled him earlier. The chorus sing a teasing refrain:

"The world is a gourd; spin it how you will,
The water sloshes to its older side."

Baroka and Sidi stand upon a low stool so all may view them. He lifts his flywhisk; she raises the new stamp where her portrait shines. Together they pivot slowly, sharing the gaze of their people and, by extension, the gaze of the theatre audience.

Lights fade on a burst of bronze percussion, leaving only the stamp's silver gleam in the half-dark, the perfect symbol: part modern machine, part ritual icon.

4.1.5 Key Dialogue Highlights

1. **Lakunle's proposal:** "We shall look upon the world through reading glasses and the pages of The Times." – shows his bookish dream of civilisation.
2. **Sidi's refusal:** "Pay the price, then claim the prize. A woman's love must wear a crown." – captures her sense of traditional worth.
3. **Baroka's flattery:** "Your beauty will ride on every camel's hump between here and Mecca, stamped upon letters of trade." – demonstrates his cunning mix of admiration and strategy.
4. **Sadiku's gossip song:** "The lion's loins are dry sand! Beat the drums for female rule!" – comic spark that drives the night's events.
5. **Sidi's final choice:** "I would rather be fourth wife to a man who bends the world than queen to a clerk who copies it." – sums up the central clash of values.

Over the span of a single village day Wole Soyinka pits energetic modern dreams against enduring Yoruba customs. He refuses to condemn one side or praise the other without humour. Instead, he shows how each character is both admirable and foolish. Lakunle's education brings fresh ideas but also vanity; Baroka's tradition guards' dignity, yet thrives on manipulation; Sidi's beauty grants agency but also tempts arrogance.

The play teaches that real progress in post-colonial Africa may not arrive through blunt rejection of the past nor through blind worship of imported forms, but through flexible negotiation inside living culture. Soyinka stages that negotiation through dance, mime, proverb, parody and bright everyday speech; so any audience, African or global, can recognise the pulse of the community.

When the drums fade, learners should feel they have walked Ilujinle's dusty tracks, weighed a pot on their own head, argued bride-price, smelt palm-oil lamps and glimpsed the ever-turning conversation between old and new. With that understanding, no doubt remains.

4.1.6 Critical Analysis

Wole Soyinka sets his sparkling comedy *The Lion and the Jewel* in the Yoruba village of Ilujinle at a moment when the wind of modern life begins to rattle the palm fronds of tradition. A wandering photographer has snapped pictures of the lovely Sidi and sold them to a city magazine, turning the village girl into a printed idol. Engineers from the government speak of laying a railway line across nearby farms so that steel might replace footpaths and the hiss of the locomotive drown the cry of the cockcrow. In the dusty schoolhouse Lakunle drills his pupils in English spelling and dreams

of a future shaped by European models. Set against these tremors the play asks one urgent question: what sort of change will truly serve the people who live between the forest and the sun-burnt road?

Lakunle makes the most noise about progress, yet he cuts the weakest figure on stage. His second-hand suit is too small, his canvas shoes slap the earth, and his ideas come straight from cheap missionary tracts rather than living experience. At first his zeal seems amusing. He tells Sidi that carrying a water pot on her head is barbaric, that the bride price is the buying of a cow, that a Christian wedding and a kiss in church mark the peak of civilisation. These phrases drift above Ilujinle like soft clouds that never break into useful rain. A closer look reveals the thin quality of his convictions. He refuses to pay the bride price less from principle than from stinginess. When he speaks of women's freedom, he still expects Sidi to cook, sweep and obey him. For him progress means eating with knives and forks, combing hair straight, drinking tea from a china cup. Soyinka selects these trifles to prove a larger point: a society that borrows foreign customs without thought can lose dignity without gaining real strength. Lakunle is forever quoting textbooks but never trusting his own senses. In the schoolyard he rails against superstition, yet when a lively dancer sways her hips, he chases her like a foolish calf. Soyinka calls him a book-fed shrimp, a creature with a swollen head of theory perched on a starved body of reality.

Baroka the Bale stands as Lakunle's opposite and the true centre of Ilujinle's life. Sixty-two years old, he still wrestles at dawn and his beard is tipped with the first grey threads of experience. Outsiders see only a conservative chief who blocked the railway by bribing a white surveyor, but Baroka's reasons run deeper than fear of speed. He believes the track will grind every village into the likeness of the last one, wiping out local flavour and turning travel into sameness. Yet he is not blind to the benefits of certain inventions. He owns a small stamp press so the village can raise revenue from trading stamps; he allows his servants to form a union; he even plans to print Sidi's smiling face on every envelope that crosses the sea. His gift is to sift the new for tools that fit the old soil. Where Lakunle talks endlessly, Baroka studies, decides and strikes. When he sees Sidi celebrated in the magazine, he resolves that the jewel must belong to the lion. He tells his senior wife Sadiku that he has lost his manhood, knowing she will gossip. Nothing spreads faster than news of a failing chief, and soon Sidi herself hears that the mighty Bale is impotent. Curious and proud, she agrees to Supper with a supposedly harmless old foe. In the bedroom Baroka stages a playful wrestling bout to prove his strength, praises her beauty, and promises that every letter leaving Nigeria will carry her portrait. By dawn the chief has won his prize without uttering a single slogan. Tradition, in Soyinka's hands, is shown not as a rigid wall but as living sap that can absorb and outwit the flash of imported ideas.

Sidi stands between teacher and chief like a bright coin flipping in sunlight. Her picture on a glossy cover fills her with pride and teaches her how quickly outsiders value a pretty face. She weighs the offers before her with clear eyes. Lakunle refuses the bride price and speaks of progress, but he is poor and laughs at local customs. Baroka promises wealth, status and a place in legend. When she believes him powerless, she marches off to mock him, showing that she is no timid fawn. She loses the battle of wits yet wins a kind of queenly fame, carried high on the village shoulders at the end of the play. Her path shows how modern attention can inflate vanity but also sharpen ambition, and how tradition still has claws that can hold what it wants.

Sadiku, Baroka's first and oldest wife, acts as messenger, spy and chorus. She accepts her role with a mix of loyalty and quiet resentment. When she thinks the chief is finally impotent, she dances alone, a tiny storm of triumph that exposes the longing of women to see the mighty brought low. Her hope is short-lived, for the Bale has used her tongue as bait. Through Sadiku, Soyinka hints that tradition can breed silent rebellion and that a wise ruler must charm not only new wives but also the faithful witnesses of his past.

The structure of the play blends Yoruba masquerade with European dramatic craft. Soyinka stages five extended sequences of dance and mime that carry much of the story's weight. The villagers replay the arrival of the photographer, waving imaginary cameras and striking poses that make the audience giggle yet also reveal how foreigners frame African life. Later, a chorus of prisoners in chains mime the white surveyor at work, shouting instructions and fleeing in terror when the sacred bull-roarer sounds. Sadiku's solo swirl around a carved likeness of Baroka announces her brief fantasy of power. After Baroka wins Sidi, dancers form a long canoe to show how the Bale enjoys each new wife on a river of time. The final bridal procession joins bride groom drummer and watcher in one pulsing circle, reminding the audience that in Yoruba theatre every spectator shares the floor with the players. These bursts of movement serve two tasks. They deliver distant events into the present moment, and they unlock the characters' inner thoughts in ways plain speech cannot. By marrying this African stage language to an English three-act shape, Soyinka proves that cultures can share a room without either one drowning.

Humour sharpens the play's critical edge. Lakunle's speeches puff up like soap bubbles and burst under the pinprick of common sense. He forbids Sidi to carry a water pot, then pulls at her shoulders when it spills. He rails against the bride price yet drools over a girl's dancing waist. The audience laughs, but the laughter urges judgment on shallow disciples of Europe who ignore local needs. Satire also touches Baroka. He calls himself the fox of the undergrowth, yet his power rests partly on show and the patient work of wives who cook and whisper on his behalf. Soyinka does not glorify polygamy or deceit; he simply reveals why many villagers prefer the steady warmth of the chief's fire to the thin light of Lakunle's lantern.

The play's objects work as symbols. The railway stands for industrial modernity, a force able to flatten hills of memory. The stamps suggest a gentler path of trade and communication, carrying local images abroad on local terms. Baroka's daily wrestling matches keep him supple; they stand for tradition as living exercise rather than stiff ceremony. Lakunle's tight coat is the straight jacket of borrowed identity, pretty to some eyes but painful to the wearer.

Soyinka refuses any easy moral. He mocks Lakunle's pretence but does not crown Baroka as a saint. The chief still collects young women, still manipulates facts, still flexes authority won by age and gender. Yet in the contest before us, he shows greater skill in keeping the village whole. Soyinka's balance sends a message: emerging Nigeria must test every promise of reform against the grain of its own life. Progress is helpful only when it grows from native soil and respects native rhythm. A plate that shatters at the first knock proves nothing except its maker's ignorance of local kitchens. A village that bars every new track might sink into mud. The path lies in choosing, shaping and sometimes marrying the new to the old as Sidi marries Baroka.

In twelve short scenes *The Lion and the Jewel*

dissects a society at a turning point. Through bright characters, rhythmic storytellers and swift wit, Soyinka warns that change is not virtue by itself. Imported manners can become empty charades when they ignore the hunger of the people. At the same time raw tradition must stay alert, ready to learn and adapt or it will decay. The final scene ends with drums, song and bridal laughter. The lion has gained the jewel, the villagers carry them both round the clearing, and the cycle of planting, harvest and courtship can begin again. Yet we leave the theatre hearing Lakunle's hollow English phrases echo beside Baroka's satisfied purr. Soyinka presses us to decide which voice will shape the nation's story and, deeper still, how each citizen may blend honest pride in heritage with an open search for growth. That question keeps the comedy alive long after the last dancer folds the costume away and turns a bright folk tale into a lasting study of culture, power and the true paths of progress.

4.1.7 Themes in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

Wole Soyinka's lively comedy *The Lion and the Jewel* looks playful on the surface, yet beneath the dance steps and teasing dialogue it wrestles with questions that face every society on the edge of change. The story follows a single day in the Yoruba village of Ilujinle, where three strong wills collide. Lakunle the young teacher waves a banner for modern progress, Baroka the ageing Bale guards the authority of tradition and Sidi the village beauty tries to measure her own worth between these two forces. Through their quarrels Soyinka explores three large themes: the struggle between tradition and modernity, the battle of the sexes, and the clash of two cultural worldviews.

The most obvious conflict in the play rises from the difference between old customs and imported reform. Lakunle returns from the city wearing a tight European jacket and quoting textbook rules. He scolds the villagers for carrying loads on their heads, describes the bride price as the buying of cattle and promises that schoolrooms and motor roads will drag Ilujinle into the shining light of progress. Baroka listens, smiles and declines the offer. He argues that steel tracks would make every journey the same and wipe away the colour of village life. To prove his point, he bribes the white surveyor and diverts the railway. This single act sets the tone of their rivalry: the teacher speaks while the chief acts. Soyinka does not condemn fresh invention; he shows Baroka welcoming a small stamp press and allowing his workers to form a union. Yet the Bale insists on choosing which novelties will serve the village and which will poison its spirit. Lakunle, by contrast, tries to force Sidi to marry without the bride price and despises her when she demands it. For him the ceremony is a relic; for her it marks honour and public worth. When he will not bend, she turns from him. The lesson is plain. Modern change can enrich a community only when it respects the living roots of custom. A blanket rejection of the past, shouted in borrowed words, amounts to no change at all.

Running alongside this argument is the keen debate over the place of women in a male-centred society. At first glance Sidi enjoys firm control. She toys with Lakunle's hopes, mocks Baroka's age and fashions a dance out of the photographer's visit to celebrate her beauty. Sadiku, the senior wife, carries secret tidings and believes she can topple the Bale by spreading news of his supposed impotence. Yet their apparent power rests on ground laid by men. Baroka manipulates Sadiku's talk, pulls Sidi into his net and adds her to his harem once she has lost the protection of maiden pride. The final wedding procession, full of drums and laughter, hides the truth that Sidi

will soon follow the pattern of earlier favourites who were moved to the outhouse when a fresher blossom caught the chief's eye. Thus, Soyinka exposes both sides of female experience. Women can be witty, bold and inventive, but within the rules of mid-century Yoruba life they remain subject to male desire and decree. The brief glow of Sadiku's victory dance, followed by her abrupt fall into shock when the Bale reclaims his strength, sums up that fragile balance. The play invites the audience to ask whether lasting change for women will come through Baroka's flexible tradition, through Lakunle's shallow reform or through some path not yet visible on stage.

A third theme widens the frame from village custom to global influence: the contest between Eurocentric and Afrocentric visions. Lakunle champions European habits as the universal mark of civilisation. He quotes the Bible, repeats bits of Victorian proverbs and copies classroom English complete with stiff grammar. To him a kiss in public and china cups on the table prove enlightenment. Baroka speaks little English yet picks up foreign gadgets when they suit his purpose. His success in turning the postal stamp into a trade tool shows an Afrocentric strategy: take what is useful, reject the rest and keep local rhythm at the centre. Sidi's glossy photographs reveal another face of Eurocentrism, for the unknown editor in Lagos places her image on the cover while shrinking Baroka to a corner near the village latrine. The act offends the chief because it measures worth by city taste. When Sidi finally chooses Baroka she is not simply yielding to power; she is endorsing a vision in which local identity shapes the terms of contact with the wider world. Soyinka does not frame the outcome as an absolute triumph of Africa over Europe, nor as a retreat into isolation. He shows instead a continuing negotiation in which Ilujinle accepts the print press yet blocks the rail line, prints a village beauty on stamps yet keeps the bride price in place. Through this pattern the play argues that genuine cultural confidence rises from selective exchange, not blind imitation.

Across these three connected themes Soyinka maintains an even hand. He mocks Lakunle's shrill speeches, but he also reminds us that the teacher hopes to raise literacy and ease the burden of labour for women. He celebrates Baroka's cunning respect for custom, but he refuses to hide the chief's lust and his use of authority to claim young wives. Sidi's pride in her own image mirrors the pride of the village, yet pride alone cannot secure freedom. Each character wins a measure of success and suffers a measure of loss. The comedy ends with music, yet the questions continue to ring.

In *The Lion and the Jewel* Soyinka persuades us that a real community, like a living body, needs both the steady heartbeat of tradition and the fresh breath of careful innovation. It needs equal respect for every voice, male and female, and it needs the courage to face the outside world without losing its own name. By weaving these ideas into lively banter, dance and song Soyinka makes philosophy light on its feet. The audience leaves the theatre amused, stirred and quietly challenged to judge the forces shaping its own street or village green. That enduring power turns a village skirmish over a bride price into a universal story about how people choose to walk into tomorrow while carrying the weight and wealth of yesterday.

4.1.8 Characterisation

Baroka

Baroka, the Bale of Ilujinle, is the living heart of Wole Soyinka's comedy. From his first brief arrival in the morning scene the power he radiates fills the stage. He speaks fewer than thirty lines before the curtain falls on the first part, yet by then the audience knows it is dealing with a remarkable man. Soyin-

ka achieves this swift effect by letting other characters talk about Baroka long before he appears, by giving him a dramatic entrance fit for a chief and by presenting him as a figure both traditional and theatrical, familiar to spectators of village masquerades. When he at last steps forward the whispers, jokes and warnings we have heard prepare us to weigh each glance and each word.

Lakunle is the first person to name him. While boasting of the changes he will force on Ilujinle the young schoolmaster vows that he will begin with "that crafty rogue" Baroka. Two items of information reach us at once. Baroka holds the title of Bale, chief of the village, a position that commands deference. Lakunle also identifies him as the main obstacle to his scheme of modern reform. Because Lakunle is known as the local madman we accept his judgement only with caution. Still, the phrase "crafty rogue" strikes a note that continues to vibrate throughout the story.

A person labelled crafty is clever in hidden ways, able to weave plots and spring surprises. A rogue is no saint yet is often more mischievous than vicious, a scamp who might cheat at cards but rarely sheds blood. The term allows warmth, a hint that the speaker half-admires the one he abuses. So it proves with Baroka. Time after time we see him thinking several steps ahead of his rivals, setting traps that snap shut so quietly, his prey scarcely feels the bite. He practises this art on wanderers from the city, on women who catch his eye and even on the British overlords who once sent officials down the bush track.

A story told by Sadiku gives the clearest early picture of his method. Years earlier a white surveyor arrived with labourers and pegs to mark the course of a projected railway. The workers hammered stakes into the red dust, measured with chains and made loud promises of progress. Watching from a distance Baroka hurried to the spot. He soon noticed that the chief foreman, a Yoruba like himself, respected the roar of the bull-roarer, that deep wooden whistle believed to summon spirits. Baroka therefore ordered his wrestler to swing the sacred instrument so that its growl rolled out of the trees. The labourers fled in terror. The white man could not drive the survey team forward alone, so the railway curve was shifted far from Ilujinle. No force was used, no threats of violence, only a piece of ritual sound, a quick eye and the willingness to pay for silence. This episode reveals a fox like mind, ready to use either modern cash or ancient awe, whichever serves best.

The campaign for Sidi's favour shows yet richer layers of the same resourcefulness. From the moment Baroka sees her picture printed on the cover of a glossy magazine, he decides that the Jewel of Ilujinle must enter his harem. But a direct order might fail, for Sidi is proud and enjoys the new fame granted by the visiting photographer. The Bale therefore plots a subtler course. He invents a story of approaching impotence and lets it fall into the ears of Sadiku, knowing she cannot keep a secret. She tells Sidi, who laughs at the notion that the mighty Baroka has lost his manhood. To tease him she accepts an invitation to supper, certain she can resist a lion whose claws have grown blunt. Inside the palace the chief combines gallantry, flattery and patient waiting until curiosity draws the girl into his bedroom. When the door closes the fox has caught the gazelle. The seduction itself, according to Sidi's later confession, is a deed for drums and ballads. Baroka's skill lies not only in trickery but in the robust charm with which he completes the conquest.

Is such conduct wicked or merely roguish? Western morals may condemn a sixty-two-year-old man who takes a new wife five months after the previous one. Yet in the cul-

ture presented on stage no law forbids a chief to add to his household, and Sidi herself enters the game hoping to boast over a broken rival. The playwright's lively tone encourages the audience to view the outcome with laughter rather than with stern judgement. Baroka leads a life of unabashed self-indulgence, but his pleasure takes forms accepted by his society: multiple wives, generous feasting, elaborate grooming and the joy of dances in the moonlight.

We meet him first while a favourite plucks the hairs beneath his arm. The act appears comic, yet it tells us much about his senses. He likes the sharp little pain followed by the soft fingers. He orders that the girl cut close to the root then tug sweetly. The Bale delights in touch, smell, flavour and display. When the travelling photographer's album returns, he feasts his eyes on the pages, lingering longest over the cover where Sidi stands beside the river like a carved figure of bronze. His jealousy springs not only from desire but from wounded pride. The magazine places Sidi in the centre while the chief of the village appears in a corner beside a latrine. In a land where age commands honour such an arrangement insults tradition. Baroka reacts first with private anger, then with the public gesture of seeking Sidi as a bride, an act that will restore his image by binding beauty to power.

Lakunle mocks him as a greedy dog and an insatiable camel, yet those who live closest to Baroka paint a softer portrait. Sadiku admits that service in the palace can be irksome, nonetheless she celebrates the bliss of the Senior Wife, mistress of gifts and influence. During the final wedding she stands as Mother of Brides, splendid in her role. Sidi may weep after her first encounter with the Bale, but when Lakunle offers marriage without bride price she refuses. She has tasted the man's vigour and glimpsed the comfort of his household. She prefers the secure warmth of the lion's cave to the cold promises of a would-be reformer.

Baroka's appetite is broad but not cruel. He never strikes a woman on stage, never drives a rival from his land and never threatens death. He prefers persuasion, ritual, riddles and games of wrestling. Even his confrontation with the white officials of the colonial government ends in quiet compromise. He lets the railway bend away rather than trying to burn the sleepers. His leadership style blends firmness and flexibility. He insists on respectful greetings yet allows each stranger a slightly altered gesture: Lakunle gives an awkward bow, the lost traveller a forced prostration, the surveyor a stiff handshake. The Bale adapts without losing dignity, illustrating a Yoruba ability to bend like the palm and not break.

Perhaps the strongest sign of his vitality is his command of language. Words obey him as wrestlers obey his grip. He twists a proverb from the Gospels, asserting that old wine tastes best in a new bottle, and at once the phrase serves three purposes. It shows his knowledge of Scripture, reveals his fondness for blending old with new and offers Sidi a teasing compliment about youthful containers and seasoned pleasures. He speaks in rich images drawn from the farm, the hunt and the marketplace. He coins fresh sayings on the spot, then ties them to his purpose with a sly smile. While Lakunle sprays the air with borrowed sentences half understood, Baroka shapes each remark to fit the moment like a tailor cutting cloth.

Behind the easy laughter lies a mind aware of change. The Bale knows that the world beyond Ilujinle is sliding toward the city and away from the drum. The rails will arrive one day despite his tricks; the school will swell; the bicycle will be replaced by the motor car. Faced with this tide he chooses not to weep or

rage but to dance, to love, to scheme and to taste. When the photographer snaps his portrait beside a latrine he turns the slight into a fresh plan for entertainment. He treats life as a wrestling match in which the foe may throw him tomorrow, but tonight he will still laugh and feast.

Is he therefore a symbol of a system doomed to vanish? Perhaps, yet his adaptability hints that he might ride the tide rather than drown beneath it. He accepts Lakunle's curt bow, shakes the white man's hand, learns English proverbs and Biblical sayings, borrows the city fashion of a printed invitation to supper. He has already absorbed foreign customs, twisting them until they serve local needs. The railway may bypass Ilujinle, but the Bale's mind runs on lines of its own laying.

By the final moments of the play Baroka stands confessed as seducer, trickster, patron and poet. He has taken Sidi, humbled Lakunle, outwitted the colonial vision of progress and preserved his personal dignity. He remains a man of appetites yet also a man of humour and subtle wit. His faults are plain: vanity, jealousy, a readiness to manipulate those weaker than himself. Yet his strengths glow more brightly: generosity, courage, inventiveness and a zest that lifts the whole village into colour.

In simple truth Baroka is a human mosaic of ancient instinct and sharp intelligence. He treasures the past but keeps his ears open for any rumour that might yield advantage. He loves women and gains their loyalty even when they curse him. He loves stories and enlarges every event that touches him into a legend worth repeating round the fire. When the drums beat for his new wedding, he enters the circle not as a tired patriarch but as the spry fox of the undergrowth, proud to show that his power thrives. The audience, sharing the quickened pulse of the dancers, recognises that such a character cannot be sealed within a single label. Call him crafty rogue, sensual lord, jealous Bale, self-indulgent patriarch, or master of language: each name captures a slice of his spirit yet leaves much unsaid. Baroka lives beyond neat phrases, and that is why the short time he spends on stage is enough to enchant the mind long after the curtain falls.

Lakunle

Lakunle is one of the first figures in *The Lion and the Jewel* and from the start he strikes the eye as a comic copy of an English gentleman. We see his face framed in the classroom window soon after Sidi appears, and in the next moment he steps out onto the empty road. The author pays loving attention to every detail of his outfit. Lakunle owns a proper three-piece suit yet it is far too tight for his thin shoulders and long arms. He wears canvas shoes of the sort boys use for games, not leather shoes fit for formal dress. A necktie hangs awkwardly at his throat and a battered felt hat sits on his head. All these pieces have been chosen to announce learning and progress but together they turn him into a figure of pity. He is eager to appear modern and educated, yet each item warns us that the image is second-hand and does not quite fit.

Sidi lets slip what the villagers say about the schoolmaster. They whisper that he is strange and foolish. Even the children mock him and cry fool behind his back, a harsh insult in a Yoruba village where respect for elders is strict. From such remarks we learn that Lakunle does not enjoy the honour that a teacher might expect. Yet the deeper portrait is formed by his own words and actions. Whenever he speaks, he tends to run on and on until his argument grows thin and his vanity peeps through. The playwright clearly wishes him to reveal his shallowness by talking too much.

Under the fragile layer of classroom polish,

Lakunle remains a young man full of ordinary desires. He is very conscious of Sidi's body. He tells her to pull her wrapper up and tie it tight, claiming it is modest, yet we feel that the sight of her breasts troubles him. He even admits that he longs to praise them in poetic language. During the dance of the lost traveller, he cannot resist pinching the girls as they swirl past and when a lively dancer sways her hips in the final scene, he leaps toward her like a fish after bait. In conversation he sounds prudish, shy to mention such parts of the body, but his quick fingers betray him. There is a devil in him, the same ordinary devil that lives in Baroka, though the older man is honest about it.

Baroka carries himself like a lion though he is already sixty-two. He still wrestles and can lift a younger man clean into the air. Lakunle is forty years younger, yet looks frail. Sidi treats him as if he were not truly a man at all. When Sadiku wonders whether to deliver Baroka's message in his presence, Sidi laughs and says that the teacher is no more dangerous than an attendant who has been made harmless. Later, when the women jump about in delight over news of Baroka's supposed weakness, Sadiku turns on Lakunle and calls him less than a man and less than the smallest woman. Stung, he declares that he is indeed a man, but his protest sounds hollow. Thus, the audience sees the neat reversal. The aged Bale pretends for a moment that he has lost his power in order to trap the girl, while the young teacher who lacks such strength keeps insisting upon a masculinity no one credits.

Their contrast shows as sharply in language as in muscle. Baroka handles words like a skilled craftsman. He can reshape a proverb or a line of Scripture until it serves his purpose. When he speaks about wine, he twists the well-known saying about new wine in old bottles, turning it into an argument that old wine tastes best in a new vessel and by that sly turn he flatters Sidi while hinting at desire. Lakunle too has a store of quotations, yet he does not digest them. Phrases from the Bible, the marriage service, English proverbs and grand Elizabethan drama tumble out of him one after another. He likens himself to Christ when he quotes that a prophet lacks honour only in his own land. He begins to recite the wedding vow as though the mere words could settle all dispute about bride price. He quotes charity begins at home and so plans to force Ilujinle to swallow his reforms first. The result is comic; the lines lie on his tongue like clothing that does not fit, words borrowed and never truly possessed.

A clear case is his attack on the custom of bride price. He begins with hot anger and strong adjectives. He calls the payment savage and barbaric, but as he rambles his fire cools. Soon the custom is merely remarkable and unpalatable. The thought has lost force before it reaches the listener. Words betray him in public exactly the way his tight suit betrays him in appearance.

Yet Lakunle is not without talent. When the villagers run to gape at the visiting photographer, he alone can interpret the stranger's clipped English. He acts as guide between worlds. In this role he shows the benefit of his schooling. Still, we notice that Baroka has also picked up what he needs from the foreign tongue. He repeats charity begins at home to justify his own comfort. Where the Bale selects the scrap of English that serves him, Lakunle gulps down whole chapters and ends up looking silly.

Why then does the schoolmaster cling to these foreign trappings? In his mind western learning means progress, and progress means respect. He believes that if he teaches arithmetic, forces the girls to cover their breasts and abolishes the bride price he will lead the village into a bright new age. But his plan ig-

nores the pride and rhythm of local life. He looks only at the surface of English ways and misses their depth, just as he sees only the glitter of the city that lies beyond the bush track. His project is a mirror of his costume: the suit promises dignity, yet its short sleeves flaunt his wrists and its trousers ride above his ankles.

When Baroka invites Sidi to the palace, Lakunle is quick to suspect wickedness, but is powerless to prevent her visit. He mutters about modern courtship and equal love yet offers no convincing alternative. At the climax he learns that Sidi has yielded to the Bale. His language slips into bombast and then crumbles. He curses the lion of Ilujinle, calls him greedy and cunning, but finally surrenders. He agrees to marry Sidi that very night although he swore, he would never pay the bride price. The news that she is no longer a maid demolishes the last of his grand ideas. He is left counting coins while the villagers laugh.

In the end, Lakunle stands as a gentle satire on the African who copies European culture without understanding either Europe or Africa. His mind is full of textbook phrases, and his body is clad in second-hand clothes. He attacks old customs yet grips them when it suits him. He longs for freedom yet wishes to force change upon others. He dreams of romance yet shrinks from physical boldness. Each boast, each borrowed quotation, each ill-chosen shoe reminds us that true strength and wisdom cannot be worn like a hat. They grow from within, the way Baroka's patient guile grows from his knowledge of the land and its people. Lakunle is still young and may learn in time, but in the play, he serves as a bright mirror in which the audience sees both the humour and the danger of shallow imitation.

4.1.9 Post-Colonial Currents in *The Lion and the Jewel*

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* dramatises a single day in a rural Yoruba village, yet within its light comedy lie many hallmarks of post-colonial writing. First, the play stages a clash between imported "progress" and indigenous practice. Lakunle, the schoolteacher, idolises Western habits learned in a colonial education system: breakable plates, public kissing, and the abolition of bride-price. His language, full of Victorian sermon phrases and textbook maxims, sounds alien in Ilujinle. By placing his rhetoric beside Baroka's proverbial speech, Soyinka exposes the lingering authority of colonial schooling and questions whether it liberates or merely displaces local knowledge. The struggle over Sidi's bride-price becomes a miniature debate over whose values will be decided the village's future.

Second, Soyinka depicts the material reach of colonial modernity through the threatened railway line. The engineers and their "white surveyor" embody economic conquest: steel tracks promise faster commerce but also erase boundaries, turning distinct villages into identical stops on a map drawn elsewhere. Baroka's successful bribe to divert the line illustrates a post-colonial paradox: resistance often requires tactical use of the coloniser's own tools- money, negotiation, bureaucratic delay. Baroka keeps his forest and his authority intact, yet he is no reactionary. He adopts a stamp press and talks of trade unions, demonstrating selective appropriation rather than blanket rejection. This balanced stance typifies many newly independent societies that must weigh the benefits of technology against cultural erosion.

Third, the play's representation of female identity reflects a post-colonial concern with

the double colonisation of women, by foreign rule and by local patriarchy. Sidi's magazine photographs, taken by an unnamed outsider, transform her into an exotic commodity sold back to her own village. She revels in the fame yet remains unaware of the external gaze that frames her body. Baroka's desire to add her image to postage stamps repeats the process on local terms: indigenous power now markets the same female icon, showing how colonial objectification can be absorbed and redeployed internally. Sadiku's fleeting triumph when she believes the Bale impotent hints at women's suppressed wishes for autonomy, even as her dance ends in fresh subordination.

Language itself becomes a post-colonial battleground. Lakunle's stiff English reveals mimicry, Homi Bhabha's notion of a colonised subject who copies the master's tongue yet never fully possesses it. Baroka's mixture of Yoruba idiom and sly biblical turnings shows "hybridity," another Bhabha term, where colonised and coloniser forms fuse into something new. Soyinka refuses a simple binary: neither pure nativism nor wholesale Westernisation prevails. Instead, linguistic code-switching, dance, mime, and communal storytelling fuse Yoruba performance traditions with European dramaturgy, asserting the validity of local aesthetics within a global conversation.

Finally, Soyinka's satire of both Lakunle's naïve Europhilia and Baroka's self-serving traditionalism reflects what post-colonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls the "de-colonisation of the mind." The play urges spectators to question imported norms *and* the ways indigenous authorities might exploit resistance for personal gain. By ending with a wedding that restores the social cycle yet leaves open the future, Soyinka suggests that true post-colonial agency lies in continuous negotiation, choosing, adapting, and sometimes resisting the legacies of empire rather than surrendering to any single grand narrative of progress.

Recap

1. Soyinka blends Yoruba traditions with European theatrical influences masterfully.
2. Lakunle mocks tradition but secretly envies Baroka's power.
3. Baroka resists railways but adopts stamps, selective progress wins.
4. Sidi's vanity grows after her photo appears in magazines.
5. Sadiku celebrates Baroka's impotence, but he outsmarts her.
6. Soyinka uses dance and mime to deepen cultural commentary.
7. Lakunle's Western ideals clash with Ilujinle's rooted traditions.
8. Baroka's cunning triumphs over Lakunle's hollow modern rhetoric.
9. Sidi chooses Baroka, valuing tradition over empty progress.
10. The play critiques blind imitation of colonial modernity.
11. Soyinka's satire exposes hypocrisy in both old and new.
12. Yoruba proverbs outwit Lakunle's borrowed English phrases.
13. Baroka's virility contrast with Lakunle's impotent intellectualism.
14. Dance sequences reveal character truths beyond spoken dialogue.
15. The finale celebrates tradition while hinting at future change.

Objective Questions

1. Who in *The Lion and the Jewel* strongly opposes the introduction of railways in the village of Ilujinle?
2. What traditional custom does Lakunle refuse to follow, causing conflict with Sidi and others?
3. Which character successfully seduces Sidi, the village beauty, despite her initial resistance?
4. In the play, what object is used symbolically to represent fragile or superficial modernity?
5. Which character performs a dance celebrating Baroka's supposed impotence, reflecting village attitudes?
6. What aspect of societal change does Wole Soyinka satirize through the contrasting worldviews in the play?
7. What nickname does Baroka use to mock Lakunle's intellectual and Western-educated demeanor?
8. What theatrical elements does Soyinka incorporate by blending Yoruba cultural practices with European drama?
9. Between Baroka and Lakunle, who ultimately wins Sidi's hand in marriage?
10. What social institution or practice does Lakunle secretly envy but publicly rejects?
11. Which character represents superficial and misguided modernity rather than authentic progress?
12. What does Baroka cunningly manipulate to maintain his power and influence in the village?
13. Who is referred to as "the jewel," symbolizing beauty and cultural significance in the play?
14. What larger colonial or cultural system does Soyinka critique through the conflicts in the play?
15. Which character symbolizes the resilience of traditional African culture in the face of change?

Answers

1. Baroka
2. Bride-price
3. Baroka
4. Breakable plates
5. Sadiku
6. Progress
7. Book-nourished shrimp
8. Dance
9. Baroka
10. Polygamy
11. Lakunle
12. Tradition
13. Sidi
14. Colonialism
15. Baroka

Assignments

1. How does Soyinka use the characters of Lakunle and Baroka to critique both blind traditionalism and superficial modernity in *The Lion and the Jewel*?
2. Analyse the portrayal of women (Sidi and Sadiku) in the play. To what extent do they exercise agency, and how are they constrained by patriarchal structures?
3. Discuss the significance of the dance and mime sequences in the play. How do they enhance the themes and cultural commentary?
4. How does Soyinka depict the clash between indigenous Yoruba culture and Western influence in *The Lion and the Jewel*?
5. In what ways does Soyinka use satire to expose the flaws in both Lakunle's and Baroka's worldviews?

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BLOCK - 05

Short Story

Unit 1

The Thing Around Your Neck

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- examine themes like immigration, cultural identity, disillusionment, power dynamics, and racial stereotyping
- critically assess the portrayal of power imbalances in personal and social relationships
- compare the expectations and realities of the American Dream as portrayed in the story
- articulate personal insights into the ways in which literature can challenge stereotypes and foster cross-cultural understanding

Prerequisites

Just think of leaving everything you've ever known behind: your family, your culture, even the familiar sounds of your language, only to land in a place where you are expected to thrive, but instead, you feel like you're drowning. This is the reality Akunna faces in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story "The Thing Around Your Neck." In this unit, we will explore the complexities of immigration, identity, and the weight of expectations. What happens when the "American Dream" is more of a mirage than a reality? How does cultural dissonance shape relationships? And what is the thing around Akunna's neck – anxiety, loneliness, or something even deeper? We will examine how Adichie masterfully captures the immigrant experience, the intersection of race and gender, and the unspoken struggles of displacement. Get ready to step into Akunna's shoes – and perhaps see a reflection of the world in her journey.

Key Words

Immigration, Anxiety, Betrayal, Independence, Relationships, Cultural differences, Identity, Disillusionment

5.1.1 Discussion

5.1.1.1 Summary

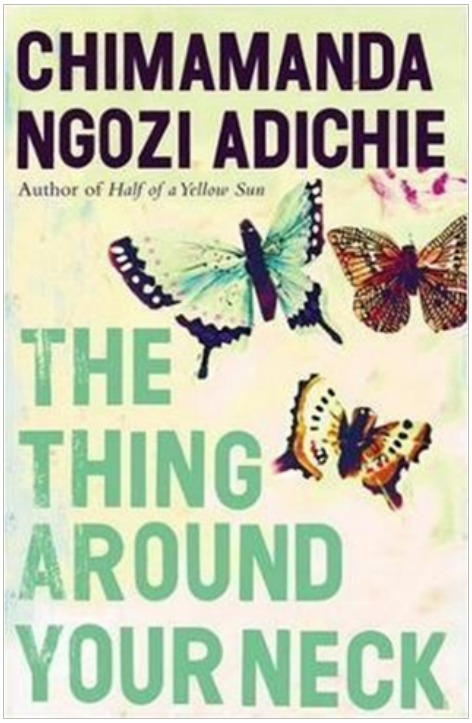

Fig. 5.1.1 The Thing Around Your Neck

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story "The Thing Around Your Neck" explores the struggles of immigration, cultural displacement, gender dynamics, and the complexities of interracial relationships. Told in the second person, the story follows Akunna, a young Nigerian woman who moves to the United States after winning the visa lottery. The narrative charts her experiences of alienation, survival, love, and loss, presenting the contrast between the expectations of life in America and its harsh realities.

Before Akunna leaves Nigeria, her family and friends envision a life of prosperity for her in America, assuming she will quickly acquire a big car, a house, and wealth. They gather in her small family home in Lagos, asking her to send back expensive gifts. However, their perception of America is deeply flawed.

When she arrives in the United States, she stays with an uncle in Maine, who had entered her name in the visa lottery. Initially, he appears supportive, helping her enrol in a community college and giving her advice on how to navigate American life. He tells her that America is give and take; it provides opportunities, but you give up a lot to get them. He explains that his job offers higher pay and stock options because his company is desperate for diversity, even featuring his picture in brochures. Despite feeling somewhat comfortable in his home, Akunna soon experiences a harsh betrayal, Her uncle attempts to sexually assault her, justifying his behaviour by saying that many women "do it" to get ahead. Devastated and unable to trust him, she leaves abruptly, without telling anyone where she is going.

Akunna boards a Greyhound bus and ends up in a small Connecticut town, where she takes a low-paying job as a waitress in a restaurant. The manager, Juan, hires her under the table for less pay, but she accepts because she desperately needs an income. Unlike the dreams her family had for her, she struggles financially, unable to afford college and barely making enough to pay for a tiny room with a stained carpet.

As time passes, Akunna experiences deep loneliness and cultural alienation. Customers assume she is Jamaican simply because she is Black, and they ask ignorant questions about Africa. Some express curiosity, while others exoticise her background. She never writes home because she has no exciting success stories to share and cannot afford to send the lavish gifts her relatives expect. Her sense of detachment from both Nigeria and America manifests in a physical sensation. At night, she feels invisible and tries to walk through her walls. When she is about to fall asleep, she feels as if something wraps itself around her neck and almost chokes her, "the thing around

your neck," a metaphor for her overwhelming loneliness, anxiety, and displacement.

One day, a wealthy, well-travelled white American man starts frequenting the restaurant. Unlike others, he asks thoughtful questions about her background and even identifies her ethnicity as Igbo, which surprises her. Initially, Akunna is wary and she finds both excessive admiration and ignorance about Africa equally condescending. However, he treats her kindly, and they eventually start dating.

Despite his good intentions, their relationship displays cultural and racial differences. He is privileged, taking time off from college to "find himself" through travel, a concept foreign to Akunna, who has always accepted what life dictated. He speaks of Africa with fascination, having visited Ghana, Uganda, and Tanzania, but his knowledge of the continent often seems superficial. He buys her impractical, decorative gifts such as a polished rock and a glass ball showing their vastly different realities. Akunna, raised in a life where everything must be useful, sees this as a reflection of his privileged detachment from necessity.

Even though Akunna begins to feel more at ease in America, racial and social perceptions of their relationship remind her that they are "abnormal." Strangers react in extreme ways and some white people are overly friendly to overcompensate for their biases, while others react with hostility. Black women either pity her for dating a white man or offer silent approval. Black men either disapprove or try too hard to accept it. Even though his parents treat her kindly, their interactions feel stiff and distant, hinting at unspoken tensions.

Just as Akunna begins to feel more settled, she receives a letter from her mother informing her that her father died five months ago. The letter reveals that part of the money she had sent home was used for his funeral. Overwhelmed with grief and guilt, Akunna realises she had been oblivious to his passing, too absorbed in her struggles in America to maintain communication with her family. She tries to recall what she had been doing at the time of his death, but the memory is lost.

Her boyfriend offers to pay for her ticket to Nigeria and even offers to accompany her, but she refuses. She does not want him to see her home the way he observes other foreign places, through the lens of a privileged outsider. As she prepares to leave, he asks if she will return. She reminds him that she has a green card and would lose it if she does not come back within a year. He confesses that he meant whether she would come back to him. She turns away and says nothing. At the airport, she hugs him for a long time, and then lets go. The ending of the story is left to the reader's imagination, making it poignantly open-ended.

5.1.1.2 Analysis

The story is narrated from the second-person perspective, immersing readers directly in the protagonist's experiences. This point of view enables readers to see events through the protagonist's eyes and feel her emotions firsthand. The narrative technique is particularly effective, as readers might identify as much with Akunna's privileged boyfriend as with Akunna herself.

The "thing around your neck" serves as a metaphor for anxiety or worry, a central theme of the story. Akunna endures a traumatic experience when nearly assaulted by someone entrusted with her care, which presents the transactional nature of relationships and opportunities for women in the U.S. She grapples with social expectations of success in America, compounded by her family's belief that life there ensures prosperity. Akunna also struggles with insecurities about her relation-

ship with her boyfriend, who comes from a privileged background. Her anxiety stems from limited choices as an immigrant woman. Although she escapes her abusive uncle, her decision comes at the cost of losing opportunities like attending school. Financial constraints further restrict her ability to move forward.

Akunna's choice reflects courage and independence, contrasting with the more common path of enduring harmful situations for the sake of security. Many women in the story collection are portrayed as being raised to rely on others, making the decision to leave difficult circumstances less common.

Akunna's disconnect from her boyfriend's privileged worldview is evident. His greatest challenge is having loving parents who want to pay for his education – an issue that starkly contrasts with her own struggles, such as witnessing her father endure humiliation over a wealthy man's car. While Akunna recognises that she should desire the comfort her boyfriend represents, she finds it difficult to respect him. His inability to eat traditional African food without vomiting presents his struggle to connect with her world.

Racism emerges as another key theme in the story. Akunna's employer assumes she will excel as a worker simply because she is an immigrant a seemingly positive assumption that is rooted in stereotyping. Similarly, her uncle was hired as a diversity token by his company. Even Akunna's relationship with her boyfriend draws attention, as others question their compatibility due to racial differences. Akunna is wary of both those who dismiss Africa and those who romanticise it, recognising that fetishising her culture is just another form of objectification.

The disillusionment with the American dream is central to Akunna's journey. Upon arriving in the U.S., she expected success to come easily. Instead, she faced betrayal by her uncle, financial struggles, and social alienation. Unable to share the reality of her struggles with her family, she refrains from writing to them, fearing they would view her situation as a failure. In reality, it is the promise of the American dream that has failed her.

Other symbols reinforce the story's themes. The brown envelopes, once used by Akunna's mother to bribe teachers, now serve as a means for Akunna to send money home in secrecy, symbolising shame and unspoken struggles. The blank fortunes she encounters reflect an uncertain future or even the absence of one.

In the concluding part, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie leaves Akunna's fate ambiguous. Her refusal to let her boyfriend accompany her to meet her family reflects her realisation that he does not belong in her world. The story's final line, "and then you let go," suggests that Akunna is unlikely to return to either him or the life she has struggled to navigate in America.

Recap

- Akunna wins a visa lottery and moves to America for opportunities
- Her family expects wealth, a car, and success in America
- She stays with her uncle in Maine, who initially seems supportive
- Her uncle attempts to sexually assault her, betraying her trust
- Akunna leaves abruptly and moves to a small Connecticut town

- She struggles financially, working as a low-paid waitress for survival
- Customers assume she is Jamaican and ask ignorant questions about Africa
- She never writes home, unable to share her difficult experiences
- "The thing around your neck" symbolises suffocating loneliness and alienation
- She meets a wealthy, well-travelled white American man at work
- He genuinely engages but also exoticises Africa and her identity
- Their relationship presents privilege, cultural gaps, and racial misunderstandings
- Society reacts strongly, from disapproval to overcompensating friendliness
- She receives a letter informing her of her father's death
- Overwhelmed with guilt, she realises she was disconnected from home
- Her boyfriend offers to buy her a ticket to Nigeria and to accompany her to Nigeria
- She refuses, not wanting him to observe her world like a tourist
- He asks if she will return, but she remains silent
- The story explores immigration, loneliness, privilege, and cultural displacement
- In the end, she hugs him tightly, then finally lets go

Objective Questions

1. What narrative perspective is used in the story?
2. Who is the protagonist of the story?
3. Which country does Akunna move to?
4. What lottery does Akunna win?
5. Where does Akunna first live in America?
6. Who helps Akunna find a job initially?
7. What kind of food fills Akunna's uncle's home?
8. What does Akunna's uncle attempt to do to her?
9. Where does Akunna move after leaving her uncle?
10. What does Akunna send to her family?
11. Who is Akunna's restaurant manager in Connecticut?
12. What tribe does Akunna belong to?
13. What metaphor represents Akunna's anxiety in the story?
14. What event prompts Akunna to return to Nigeria?
15. What is the final action Akunna takes at the airport?

Answers

1. Second-person
2. Akunna
3. United States
4. Visa
5. Maine
6. Uncle
7. Nigerian
8. Assault
9. Connecticut
10. Money
11. Juan
12. Igbo
13. Thing around her neck
14. Father's death
15. Holding her white lover in a long hug and then letting go

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of the second-person narrative technique in portraying Akunna's journey. How does it enhance the reader's understanding of her struggles and emotions?
2. Examine the theme of disillusionment with the American dream in Akunna's story. How does her experience contrast with her initial expectations and her family's perceptions of America?
3. Analyse the metaphor of "the thing around your neck" as it relates to Akunna's experiences in the United States. What does it symbolise, and how does its loosening reflect her personal growth?
4. Explore the role of cultural differences and social challenges in Akunna's relationship with her boyfriend. How do these factors shape their bond and Akunna's perspective on their future together?
5. Evaluate the portrayal of transactional relationships and sacrifices in the story. How do these elements highlight the struggles faced by immigrant women like Akunna in a foreign land?

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BLOCK - 06

Novels

Unit 1

Wide Sargasso Sea

- Jean Rhys

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Summarise the plot and three-part structure of Wide Sargasso Sea
- Identify and explain the main post-colonial themes shown in the novel
- Analyse how Rhys's use of setting, multiple narrators and direct Creole speech challenges colonial viewpoints
- Relate Rhys's rewriting of Jane Eyre to a wider tradition of post-colonial novels that "write back" to empire

Prerequisites

Post-colonial fiction grew from the need of formerly colonised people to answer the stories that empire had told about them. During the height of European expansion, the dominant novels in English, French, and Spanish portrayed colonised lands as exotic backdrops and colonised people as silent figures. They were shown gathering spices, fanning sweating planters or like Brontë's Bertha Mason sweeping through corridors as nameless terrors. Readers in London or Paris saw the Caribbean, India, or Africa through that narrow lens, so empire's moral doubts stayed hidden. After the Second World War, independence movements rose across Asia, Africa, and the West Indies. Writers who had grown up under colonial classrooms began to say, "Our history looks different from here." Their novels took the same European language and style that had once silenced them and used it to question the myths of civilisation, hierarchy, and racial destiny.

One early signal was Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Achebe re-centred an Igbo farmer whose life is torn apart by British missionaries. Where earlier adventure tales spoke only of brave explorers, Achebe wrote village rituals, harvest songs, and internal quarrels in patient detail. A few years later, Nigeria, Ghana, and Trinidad gained political freedom. Literary freedom followed. In the Caribbean, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* and V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* mapped the damage done when plantation society told children to admire England but distrust their own skin. In India, writers such as Raja Rao and later Salman Rushdie mixed English with Hindi,

Urdu, and mythic storytelling to show that language itself had been a battlefield. Post-colonial critics soon described three chief strategies in these books. Abrogation rejects the idea that only "Oxford English" is correct, while appropriation bends that English to local rhythms. Re-vision retells an imperial classic from the other side.

Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea is a master class in that third strategy. Rhys grew up a white Creole in Dominica, feeling both privileged and estranged. When she read Jane Eyre in a cold English boarding school, she felt a stab of recognition and anger: "that poor ghost in the attic—she came from my islands, yet no one asked her opinion." Decades later, she answered Brontë's novel by giving Bertha Mason a birth name, a childhood, and a voice heavy with Caribbean cadences. Rhys shows how emancipation wrecks the Cosway estate, how race hatred isolates Antoinette, and how an English marriage market turns her into collateral. The result is both a haunting Gothic tale and a fierce critique of colonial gender politics.

To place Rhys within world literature, we must see how her book sits beside two other forms of post-colonial rewriting. First, there are novels that shift the setting forward in time, such as J. M. Coetzee's Foe, which moves Defoe's Robinson Crusoe into South African allegory. Secondly, there are novels that explode the single viewpoint, like Wide Sargasso Sea, by sharing narration among characters whose voices had been muted. In Rhys's case, Antoinette, Rochester, and Grace Poole each tell part of the story, forcing readers to weigh competing truths. This polyphony echoes the political reality of newly independent islands where French patois, English statutes, and African folklore coexist.

Because Wide Sargasso Sea speaks from the Caribbean but uses standard English, it also exemplifies the linguistic debate in post-colonial studies. Ngũgĩ waThiong'o argued for writing in mother tongues; Rhys chose the colonial language but laced it with local sights, scents, and proverbs so strongly that its centre of gravity shifts southwards. When Antoinette describes Coulibri after rain—"leaf smells, earth smells, the smell of green fruit" and the "sweet and strong" scent of orchids—the English lexicon suddenly carries Caribbean memory. Students reading those lines learn how a writer can "creolise" the coloniser's words, undermining claims that only London speech is literary.

Post-colonial novels do more than record injustice; they imagine survival. Antoinette's ending hints at tragedy, yet her brief return to self-awareness ("Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do") also asserts agency. Modern post-colonial fiction continues that thread, from TsitsiDangarembga'sNervous Conditions to Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. Each novel asks: who tells the story, who is silenced, and how can language heal the wounds of history?

Key Words

Creole, Hybridity, Othering, Displacement, Voice, Colonialism, Gaze

6.1.1 Introduction

Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) has become a classic of postcolonial literature. It is a prequel and response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, telling the story of Bertha Mason (whom Rhys calls Antoinette) from her own point of view. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha appears only as a "madwoman" locked in an attic, with no chance to tell her own story. Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* to explore Bertha's past in Jamaica and expose the racial and cultural biases hidden in the original text. *As one scholar notes*, Rhys "gives voice to Edward Rochester's mad wife, Bertha" by exploring "the possibility of another side to Jane Eyre." Through this, Rhys directly addresses the assumptions Brontë left unexamined and the imperial perspective Brontë takes for granted.

Wide Sargasso Sea is especially important in postcolonial studies because it centres a character who was silenced under colonial narratives. The novel itself is written in English (the coloniser's language) but is set in post-Emancipation Jamaica, when society was still adjusting to the end of slavery. Critics point out that Rhys "uses the language of the mainstream power" to construct "a cultural self for the formerly suppressed... voice of the Creole peoples." In other words, Rhys deliberately wrote her story in English in order to give a platform to Caribbean experiences that British literature had ignored. By doing so, the novel becomes a clear example of postcolonial "writing back". It reclaims English literary tools to tell the story of the colonies. This rewriting of Jane Eyre in standard English is a deliberate form of resistance to colonial storytelling.

Because of these qualities, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is widely studied in literature and postcolonial courses. It highlights issues of race, gender, and power that were very sensitive during the colonial era. By reading it, students see how historical events (like emancipation) affected real lives and how literary perspectives can shift when told by a different narrator. The novel's blend of Caribbean setting with English language and Gothic style invites readers to rethink familiar narratives. In this way, Wide Sargasso Sea opened the door for many Caribbean writers and scholars to re-examine colonial history through fiction.

6.1.2 Jean Rhys: Life and Background

Jean Rhys was born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams in 1890 in Roseau, Dominica, in the Caribbean. Her father was Welsh and her mother was Creole (of French-Dominican background). This mixed heritage meant Rhys was born into the Creole culture of the Caribbean but had European blood. As one critic notes, Rhys "experienced being Creole both in the Caribbean and in England." In other words, she personally understood what it felt like to belong fully to neither the white society nor the black society. This real-life sense of being "neither white nor black" influenced her writing deeply. Rhys later said that she grew up with an identity that no one around her fully accepted, which parallels how Antoinette feels out of place in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Fig. 6.1.1 Jean Rhys

Rhys left the Caribbean as a teenager. She moved to London at age 16 and later worked as a cabaret singer in Paris. In Paris, she met other writers, and Ford Madox Ford encouraged her to write. She published her first stories in 1927 and three novels in the 1930s, including *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). These early works already showed her interest in women caught between cultures. After World War II, Rhys had a long period of obscurity and poor health. In fact, Britannica notes she "stopped writing for nearly three decades" until *Wide Sargasso Sea* brought her renewed fame.

When Rhys published *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, it revived her career. The novel drew on her Caribbean childhood and themes she often explored, like exile and identity. Rhys's work after that included short stories ("Tigers Are Better-Looking", "Sleep It Off, Lady)" and a sense of literary comeback. Critics point out that Rhys's own life was very similar to her heroine's: she was a white Creole woman who moved to England and felt like an outsider. Scholar NesrŞenel emphasises that Rhys "was deeply influenced by her Creole heritage" and understood what it meant to be "accepted neither within the black community nor by the white representatives of the colonial power." Like Antoinette, Rhys grew up loved by some family members but always conscious of her "in-between" status. This personal history explains why Rhys consistently explored the conflicts of race and culture in her work. Her life of displacement and divided identity provided the foundation for a novel like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where these issues are the main focus.

6.1.3 Summary (of Wide Sargasso Sea)

The novel has three parts, each with a different narrator and setting.

Part One (Jamaica, narrated by Antoinette):

Antoinette Cosway grows up on the Coulibri Estate in Jamaica just after slavery was abolished. Her family used to be wealthy planters, but their fortunes have collapsed. When Antoinette is a young girl, her half-brother Lili disappears into a hole during play and dies, and soon after, her mother Annette goes insane. Her father (Mr. Cosway) dies of grief not long after. This leaves Antoinette scared and alone. She remembers Coulibri fondly – describing lush gardens, white walls, and bright sunlight with wonder and sorrow. She finds comfort in nature and memories of happier times. Antoinette also makes friends; one friend is a black Jamaican girl named Tia. However, their friendship is overshadowed by racial tension.

At one dramatic moment during the Coulibri fire, Antoinette runs to Tia and begs, "I will live with Tia... not to leave Coulibri." Tia is terrified and responds by throwing a stone at Antoinette, leaving Antoinette with "blood on her face, tears on Tia's." Antoinette later says it felt "as if I saw myself." Critics call this the "looking-glass" scene: Antoinette literally sees herself in Tia. This moment highlights her confusion over where she belongs. It shows that the lines between white and black communities are breaking down – the colonial society labels her as both.

After the Coulibri fire, Antoinette is taken in by her Aunt Cora (Annette's kind sister) and her husband, Mr. Cosway. They love her like their own daughter. Antoinette is sent to a convent school in Jamaica to get an education. In that time, a handsome Englishman arrives at Coulibri, courts Antoinette, and they fall in love. Part One ends with their wedding. Antoinette is hopeful for the future. She trusts this new life to be secure, not yet

aware of the dangers ahead. She feels full of optimism, still innocent about the challenges her new marriage will bring.

Part Two (Jamaica, narrated by Antoinette's husband):

The second part is told by Antoinette's English husband (implicitly Mr. Rochester) during their honeymoon and married life in Jamaica. The couple first stays briefly at the rebuilt Coulibri and then moves to the husband's family estate near Spanish Town. Cultural misunderstandings begin almost immediately. The husband does not understand the Caribbean customs: he witnesses an Obeah ceremony (a folk healing ritual) for Antoinette's sick mother, and other local events confuse and frighten him. He also feels uneasy about Antoinette's family's Catholic faith and the racial climate around them.

Meanwhile, Antoinette's cousin Daniel Cosway shows up. He approaches the husband with subtle flattery and then betrays information. Daniel tells the husband privately that Annette went mad and claims that Antoinette's family is cursed. He admits he isn't really related to Antoinette, showing he is only motivated by money. These lies destroy the husband's trust. He grows distant and angry. He starts to think of Antoinette as dangerous or "possessed." He even threatens to stop her speaking French or mixing with local people. When Daniel implies he is taking payments for his information, the husband becomes convinced he must escape.

By the end of Part Two, the husband's true nature comes out. He coldly changes Antoinette's name to "Bertha" and later calls her "Marionette," treating her as his property. He starts sending letters to someone in England, hinting that he will divorce Antoinette and marry another woman. Antoinette begins to realise he is preparing to leave her, but she cannot control the situation. In desperation, she begs him to stay in Jamaica. He ignores her pleas and boards a ship bound for England with the intention of marrying someone else. Part Two concludes with the couple sailing away from Jamaica. Antoinette is devastated at losing her homeland. The husband's decision leaves her feeling isolated and betrayed.

Part Three (England, narrated by Grace Poole and Antoinette):

The third part jumps ahead to 1845 in England. Here Antoinette, now called Bertha, has been locked in the attic of Thornfield Hall for some years. Grace Poole, the servant assigned to care for her, becomes the first narrator in this section. Grace describes a pale, restless woman who sometimes laughs or cries alone. Grace reports that Antoinette often sings old Jamaican songs in her sleep and sometimes laughs under her breath. Grace feels pity for her but can do little to help. From Grace's calm narrative, we see how different Antoinette's life is now: there are no gardens, only dark corridors. Grace notices that Antoinette rarely speaks except in dreams or moments of fear.

Later, the narration switches to Antoinette's own diary entries. Through these, Antoinette reveals her memories of Jamaica: the "bright sun" on flowers, the smell of wet earth after rain, and the sound of the distant Caribbean waves. She writes in a poetic, confused voice. She contrasts these warm memories with her cold present. She becomes increasingly agitated and talks about running free in the garden of Coulibri. Over several entries, it's clear Antoinette's mind is breaking. She writes of flying away or burning everything. Grace notes that she sometimes smiles sadly as she remembers her past.

The final scene is told from Antoinette's perspective. She is carrying a lit candle and sneak-

ing through Thornfield's dark hallways. Her heart is filled with both sorrow and anger. The novel ends at that tense moment of a possible arson. We never see the fire, but Antoinette's actions strongly echo the fate of Rochester's house in *Jane Eyre*. As one critic observes, Antoinette has "contrasted her bleak existence with her vibrant Caribbean past," and her diary suggests a vivid image of her setting the house ablaze. In summary, Part Three shows Antoinette consumed by grief and rage, about to take a final act of defiance. Her descent into madness is complete by the end, and the novel closes as she moves toward what will be her final, desperate act.

6.1.4 Postcolonial Analysis

Rhys's novel is rich in postcolonial themes and methods. It consciously re-tells the colonial story from the viewpoint of the colonised. One central idea is recasting perspective. In *Jane Eyre,* the narrator (Jane) is English and the Caribbean Bertha is a nameless other. Rhys changes that by letting Antoinette/Bertha tell her own story in Parts One and Three. Scholars stress this shift. For example, NesrŞenel notes that Rhys "gives voice to Edward Rochester's mad wife, Bertha" by exploring "another side to *Jane Eyre*." Rhys literally puts Bertha "centre stage," making her a fully human character with feelings and thoughts. As Antoinette herself writes in the novel, "there is always the other side" – meaning there are always other perspectives. This message is built into the story's structure.

Rhys also employs symbolism and setting to critique colonialism. One famous scene in Part One (after Coulibri burns) doubles as symbolism: Antoinette faces Tia and notes they look at each other "blood on my face, tears on hers, as if I saw myself." Critics call this the "looking-glass" moment: Antoinette and Tia see themselves in each other. This symbolises Antoinette's split identity and foreshadows her alienation. In a larger symbol, the two houses – Coulibri in Jamaica and Thornfield Hall in England – mirror Antoinette's fate. Coulibri stands for her Caribbean heritage and family history. When it decays and finally burns, it shows how her roots are destroyed by colonial forces. As Anup Kumar Das notes, Coulibri "represents Antoinette's family history and her connection to the Caribbean," and its ruin mirrors the "destructive effects of colonialism" on her identity. Thornfield, in contrast, is cold and labyrinthine; it represents the oppressive English world. This careful use of setting shows how colonial history shapes each character's home and security.

Another key point is intersectional oppression. Antoinette suffers because she is both Creole and a woman. Nesr Senel argues that Bertha's madness is tied to "double and even triple oppression" being Creole, being a woman, and living under colonial patriarchy. In practice, Rochester treats Antoinette as property. He renames her, locks her away, and forbids her from speaking French. As one critic observes, he lives in a "patriarchal world where women are luxury items to be bought, enjoyed and discarded." In this light, Wide Sargasso Sea shows that colonialism involved not only race but also gender power. Antoinette is crushed by racism from society and by patriarchal control in her marriage simultaneously. This layered oppression is why her sanity breaks. The novel forces readers to see her "madness" not as an inherent flaw, but as the result of being dehumanised on all sides.

Finally, the novel's storytelling technique is itself a postcolonial statement. *Wide Sargasso Sea* uses multiple narrators (Antoinette, her husband, Grace Poole), whereas Jane Eyre had only one. Antoinette even insists that "there is always the other side." Literary scholars emphasise this narrative choice: Rhys allows each voice to tell part of the truth.

As Cheryl McLeod puts it, Rhys deliberately places Bertha's voice at the centre so that "she can tell the story from her perspective." For readers, this means we cannot trust any single account alone. We see that Rochester's diary (Part Two) and Antoinette's diary (Part Three) contradict each other in key ways. This highlights a postcolonial lesson: history and truth are complex, and we must listen to the previously silenced voices to get the full picture.

Thus, *Wide Sargasso Sea* uses its characters, symbols, and structure to expose colonial power dynamics. Rhys is effectively doing literary criticism through fiction: she shows that Mr. Rochester's comfort and wealth (and *Jane Eyre's* happy ending) were built on colonial exploitation, she gives a voice to the Creole heroine, and she makes readers witness the pain caused by racism and sexism. In doing all this, Rhys transforms a Gothic romance into a sharp postcolonial critique, accessible to readers who carefully analyse its language and perspective.

6.1.5 Character Sketches

Antoinette Cosway (later Bertha Mason)

The Creole protagonist. Antoinette is born in Jamaica to a white plantation family, but her early life is full of loss. As a child, she is loving and imaginative, filled with vivid descriptions of the garden, sun, and colours of Coulibri. She adores her mother and feels rooted in the island. However, tragedy shakes her her half-brother's death and her mother's madness leave her orphaned. Antoinette's voice is lyrical and emotional. Critically, Antoinette "felt rejected by the Black community" and "her identity was connected to the island," which shows how tightly she identifies with Jamaica. Yet after marriage, she is taken to England, grows increasingly passive, and her diary entries become fragmented and desperate. She is often called "the mad Creole" by characters, reflecting how colonial society couldn't understand her. By the end of the novel, she is broken and determined to escape, hence the scene where she carries the candle, implying she will set fire to Thornfield.

The English Husband (Mr Rochester)

The unnamed English gentleman who marries Antoinette. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he is simply called "the husband" and narrates Part Two. He appears proud, anxious, and ultimately cruel. When he first meets Antoinette, he is drawn to her exotic beauty; he even calls her "Belle." But as their life continues, he becomes paranoid about Jamaica's influence. He cannot understand the local customs or Antoinette's Caribbean heritage. He labels her "dangerous" and eventually gives her the name "Bertha" to mark her as his property. Critics observe that Rochester inhabits "a patriarchal world where women are luxury items... to be bought, enjoyed and discarded," and he treats Antoinette accordingly. By the end of Part Two, he has decided to abandon her: he is planning divorce and a new marriage in England, showing his complete lack of empathy. He is a complex villain – some readers may feel he is also a victim of his culture – but WSS makes clear that his actions destroy Antoinette's life.

Christophine

Antoinette's loyal nurse and mentor from Martinique. Christophine is strong, wise, and fiercely independent. She is described as "much blacker" than others and having "a quiet voice and a quiet laugh," emphasising her calm but powerful nature. Christophine practices obeah (Caribbean folk magic) and is proud of her heritage. In the novel, she is one of the few who openly stands up for Antoinette. In Part Two, she boldly scolds Rochester for his cruelty and even brings him poison (hemlock) to punish him for hurting Antoinette. She advises Antoinette to hold on

to hope and tells her that she loves life like a moving river. Christophine represents Caribbean strength and resistance against injustice. Her presence reminds Antoinette of her roots and offers the courage to fight oppression.

Aunt Cora

Antoinette's kind aunt (her mother's sister). Aunt Cora and her husband, Mr. Cosway, rescue Antoinette after the Coulibri fire. Cora is gentle, compassionate, and deeply religious. She cares for Antoinette as her own daughter, providing a safe and loving home. Unlike most characters, Aunt Cora shows concern for others: after the fire, she and Annette give their own food to starving people in the village. She prays for Antoinette constantly. Cora also values Antoinette's education and faith, sending her to school. Later, when Antoinette is in England, Aunt Cora secretly sends her money to help, which shows her ongoing support. Aunt Cora symbolises the supportive family member who truly understands suffering, in contrast to most of Antoinette's world.

Daniel Cosway

A smooth-talking, greedy man who claims to be Antoinette's half-brother. He was born in Dominica and raised partly by plantation owners before moving to England. Daniel appears in Part Two seeking profit. He is courteous and flattering to Rochester, but his motive is money. Daniel tells Rochester that Annette (Antoinette's mother) is still insane, shattering any trust Rochester had in Antoinette. He openly admits he is not truly related, showing he betrays kin for cash. Scholars note Daniel's lies "lead to further marital discord." In short, Daniel's character represents betrayal and ambition. His betrayal is crucial to the plot: without his meddling, Antoinette's husband might not have turned against her so completely.

Grace Poole

The servant assigned to look after Antoinette in England. Grace is calm, practical, and kind-hearted. In Part Three, she takes on a minor role as a narrator, quietly describing Antoinette's condition. Grace reports that Antoinette wanders the halls at night, sometimes singing to herself or laughing in her sleep. She never scolds or ridicules Antoinette; instead, she often feels pity for the tormented woman. Through Grace's perspective, readers see Antoinette's isolation and confusion. Grace's narration provides an outside view on Antoinette's decline, highlighting how alone and forgotten Antoinette truly is. Grace represents the humanity that still cares in a story dominated by cruelty and misunderstanding.

6.1.6 Major Themes

Identity and Hybridity

Antoinette's mixed heritage highlights the confusion of identity after colonialism. As a Creole (with a white father and Creole mother), she does not fully belong to either the British colonial class or the black Jamaican community. The novel shows how painful this in-between status is. For example, Antoinette is taunted with racial slurs – people call her family "white cockroaches" and "white niggers", which clearly marks her as an outsider in Jamaica. At the same time, in England she is treated as exotic. Antoinette even refers to colonial society as "the white people," as if she were separate from them. This theme shows how fixed labels like "black" and "white" break down in a mixed society. *Wide Sargasso Sea* demonstrates that identity under colonialism is a complex mix of cultures, not fitting neatly into any one group.

Colonialism and Power

The story illustrates the enduring legacy of colonialism. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set just after slavery is abolished, but the social and economic consequences remain. The Coulibri estate, once wealthy, symbolises the old colonial order. Its decay and destruction represent the end of that system. Scholar Anup Kumar

Das notes that Coulibri "represents Antoinette's family history and her connection to the Caribbean," and when it is destroyed, it mirrors "the destructive effects of colonialism" on her life. Similarly, the novel makes it clear that British power and wealth in Jamaica were built on slavery and plantations. Some critics explicitly point out that Rochester's inheritance and Jane Eyre's fortune came from colonial estates. In short, the characters' comfort is shown to rest on a violent past. By revealing that Rochester's money comes from slavery (something Brontë never mentioned), Rhys critiques how the empire's moral authority was built on exploitation. The theme of colonialism in the novel teaches that the island's problems and Antoinette's fate are directly linked to the history of empire.

Displacement and Belonging

Forced uprooting is a central theme. Antoinette loses her home twice: first when Coulibri is destroyed, then again when her English husband forces her to leave Jamaica. Critics point out that Antoinette literally "loses her homeland." Her vivid memories of home (the warm sun, bright flowers, and the sea breeze) are constantly contrasted with her life in England, which is cold and unfamiliar. Each move deepens her sense of exile. Even her husband feels out of place on the island, which partly explains why he insists on returning to England. By the end of the novel, Antoinette is a person without a home. This theme shows the trauma of exile and belonging: Rhys highlights the idea that home is more than a building or country, it is a feeling that Antoinette can never reclaim once torn away.

Voice, Storytelling, and Silence

Wide Sargasso Sea is fundamentally about giving Antoinette a voice that *Jane Eyre* denied her. In Brontë's novel, Bertha's thoughts and history are completely absent. Rhys restores them by letting Antoinette narrate much of the story. Parts One and Three of *Wide Sargasso Sea* are told in Antoinette's own words, so we hear her emotions, dreams, and pain directly. Literary critics emphasise this choice: Rhys puts Antoinette "centre stage" so she can tell the story from her perspective. By contrast, in Jane Eyre she had no narrative at all. The result is that *Wide Sargasso Sea* constantly reminds readers that every person has their own story and viewpoint. In the final diary entries, Antoinette literally steps out of silence and reclaims her identity through language. The novel's very title suggests perspective: we are hearing "a sargasso sea" of memories. In short, this theme teaches that history and literature must include voices that were once silenced, and that hearing those voices can change our understanding.

Othering and Cultural Conflict

This theme shows how Antoinette and Caribbean culture are treated as the "Other" by European colonists. Rochester, for instance, often thinks of Antoinette as exotic, unpredictable, or dangerous. Rhys uses Gothic and dramatic imagery to challenge this. By showing Antoinette's point of view, the novel suggests that the real horror is racism and prejudice, not the person of Antoinette. Critics note that Rhys's narrative "unveils the systematic dehumanisation and exoticisation of non-European cultures." For example, scenes that *Jane Eyre* left mysterious or frightening (such as Bertha's moans or the fire she started) are given explanation here from Antoinette's perspective. Rhys flips the usual framing: she makes the readers feel pity for Antoinette and see Rochester's attitude as the true monster. In this theme, the novel exposes how colonial powers cast entire cultures as strange or inferior – showing that such "othering" can destroy lives.

Each of these themes – identity, colonial power, displacement, narrative voice, and other-

ing – is woven together in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Together, they reveal how Jean Rhys crafted a nuanced portrait of the colonial world and challenge readers to think critically about the legacy of empire. By the end, students see that Rhys is not just telling a Gothic story but asking deeper questions about who has the right to tell a story and whose voices are heard.

Studying Wide Sargasso Sea gives students insight into how literature can question history. It shows that stories from the margins can change our understanding of well-known narratives and of colonialism's impact. For instance, by giving Bertha Mason a full story and voice, Rhys invites readers to consider the lives of people ignored by history. This helps students think critically about colonialism and its lasting effects.

Recap

- Emancipation Jamaica setting
- Coulibri estate decays
- Antoinette called "white cockroach"
- Friendship then rupture with Tia
- Fire destroys childhood home
- Convent schooling safety
- Marriage arranged for dowry
- English husband nameless narrator
- Daniel Cosway's poison letters
- Renaming to "Bertha" = power grab
- Christophine'sobeah intervention
- Husband's fear of Creole speech
- Journey north across "wide" sea
- Thornfield attic confinement
- Grace Poole caretaker lens
- Fragmented diary entries
- Caribbean memories vs English cold
- Symbol: mirror scene blood/tears
- Symbol: gardens vs corridors
- Themes of hybridity, exile
- Language abrogation and appropriation
- Multiple narrators = contested truth
- Colonial economy funds Rochester
- Gender + race = double oppression

- Fire motif destruction & agency
- Post-colonial rewriting of classic
- Gothic devices re-purposed
- Critique of patriarchal gaze
- Question of who controls story
- Ending implies fiery resistance

Objective Questions

1. Who is the author of *Wide Sargasso Sea*?
2. What Caribbean island was Rhys born on?
3. Antoinette's married surname in England?
4. What folk practice does Christophine use?
5. Which Brontë novel does Rhys rewrite?
6. Name Antoinette's childhood estate ?
7. What word does Rochester force on Antoinette?
8. Daniel Cosway's motive in writing letters?
9. In literary terms, giving voice to the silenced "other" is called?
10. Final object Antoinette carries in Thornfield?

Answers

1. Rhys
2. Dominica
3. Mason
4. Obeah
5. Eyre
6. Coulibri
7. Bertha
8. Money
9. Revision
10. Candle

Assignments

1. Discuss how Rhys uses multiple narrators to challenge the single colonial viewpoint of *Jane Eyre*.
2. Analyse the symbolism of fire in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, linking the Coulibri blaze and Thornfield's impending ruin.

3. Examine Christophine's role as both cultural guardian and moral critic in the novel.
4. How does Rhys portray hybridity through Antoinette's relationships with Tia and Rochester?
5. Evaluate the ways economic power drives the plot, particularly in Rochester's treatment of Antoinette.
6. Compare Rhys's linguistic strategies with another post-colonial novel of your choice, focusing on how language resists colonial authority.

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4. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, editors. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2002.
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SIXTH SEMESTER BA ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE CORE - B21EG07DC
POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURES (SET -A)

Time: 3 Hours Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence *(1x10=10)*

1. Who coined the term "subaltern?"
2. Name the poet of "Piano and Drums."
3. Define "mimicry" in one sentence.
4. What is the setting of *Wide Sargasso Sea*?
5. Who wrote *The Lion and the Jewel*?
6. What does the phrase "the empire writes back" suggest?
7. Mention one theme in "The Thing Around Your Neck."
8. What type of poem is "Australia" by A.D. Hope?
9. What is colonialism?
10. What is hybridity in postcolonial theory?
11. What does "A Far Cry from Africa" primarily deal with?
12. Who is the protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea*?
13. What is the central conflict in *The Lion and the Jewel*?
14. Name the writer of "Background Casually."
15. Who wrote *The White Man's Burden*?

SECTION B

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences *(2x5=10)*

16. Explain the concept of hegemony with an example.
17. What does Gabriel Okara contrast in "Piano and Drums?"
18. What is the significance of the title "The Thing Around Your Neck?"
19. How does Soyinka portray the clash between tradition and modernity?
20. Describe the tone of "Journey to the Interior."
21. What role does nature play in *Wide Sargasso Sea*?
22. Mention two key themes from Bill Ashcroft's essay "The Empire Writes Back."
23. What is the role of women in *The Lion and the Jewel*?
24. How does Nissim Ezekiel represent identity in "Background Casually?"
25. What does "Australia" critique about its cultural heritage?
26. What are the psychological and emotional impact of colonialism

SECTION C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph. *(5x6=30)*

27. Discuss the theme of cultural dislocation in "Piano and Drums."
28. How does "Background Casually" reflect postcolonial identity struggles?
29. Evaluate the use of the forest metaphor in *Journey to the Interior*.
30. Examine the theme of hybridity in *Wide Sargasso Sea.*
31. What makes *The Lion and the Jewel* a postcolonial drama?
32. Summarise the major points in Bill Ashcroft's essay "The Empire Writes Back."
33. Explore the narrative style of "The Thing Around Your Neck."
34. What colonial anxieties are present in "A Far Cry from Africa?"
35. How is race represented in *Wide Sargasso Sea*?
36. What is the significance of Lakunle's character in *The Lion and the Jewel* ?
37. Discuss the importance of subaltern voices in postcolonial literature.

SECTION D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words. *(10x2=20)*

38. Critically analyse how *Wide Sargasso Sea* reimagines the colonial narrative through a female perspective.

39. Discuss how postcolonial poetry deals with themes of identity, memory, imagination and sense of belonging.

40. How does *The Lion and the Jewel* portray the dynamics of power and resistance in a colonised society?

41. Discuss the relevance of Bill Ashcroft's theoretical framework in understanding postcolonial texts

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SIXTH SEMESTER BA ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE CORE - B21EG07DC
POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURES (SET -B)

Time: 3 Hours Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence *(1x10=10)*

1. Who wrote *The White Man's Burden*?
2. Which novel by Chinua Achebe critiques colonialism's impact on Igbo society?
3. What term describes the blending of indigenous and colonial cultures in postcolonial theory?
4. What musical instrument symbolises Western modernity in "Piano and Drums"?
5. Which concept, introduced by Edward Said, critiques Western depictions of the East?
6. Who is the protagonist of "Background, Casually"?
7. What is the central theme of A D Hope's "Australia"?
8. Which rebellion is referenced in A Far Cry from Africa?
9. What does the "interior" symbolise in Margaret Atwood's "Journey to the Interior"?
10. Who is the "Lion" in *The Lion and the Jewel*?
11. Which concept introduced by Homi Bhabha refers to ironic imitation?
12. Which book by Frantz Fanon explores psychological effects of colonialism?
13. What term is used to describe those outside power structures?
14. Name one major effect of colonialism on indigenous languages.
15. What does "english" (with small 'e') signify in postcolonial theory?
16. Which concept refers to displacement due to colonisation?

SECTION B

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences *(2x5=10)*

16. How does Gabriel Okara use symbolism in "Piano and Drums"?
17. How does A D Hope critique Australian identity in Australia?
18. How does Margaret Atwood explore psychological landscapes in Journey to the Interior?
19. What is the significance of the bride-price in The Lion and the Jewel?
20. What is the function of literature in resisting colonial narratives?
21. Why is identity a recurring theme in postcolonial literature?
22. What does Gayatri Spivak mean by "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
23. Why did Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o stop writing in English?
24. What is meant by "cultural erasure"?
25. What is the significance of setting in *Wide Sargasso Sea*?

SECTION C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph. *(5x6=30)*

27. How does "Background, Casually" reflect the postcolonial identity crisis?
28. Analyse the use of irony in A D Hope's Australia.
29. How does Derek Walcott portray colonial violence in "A Far Cry from Africa"?
30. Explain the significance of language in "The Empire Writes Back".
31. Discuss the role of gender in postcolonial literature, with reference to *The Lion and the Jewel.*
32. How does Margaret Atwood use landscape as a metaphor in Journey to the Interior?
33. What is the importance of place and displacement in postcolonial writing?
34. How does Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o highlight the role of education in colonial control?
35. Explain how postcolonial texts represent historical revisionism.
36. Describe how postcolonial writers use allegory and symbolism.
37. Discuss the representation of migration and exile in postcolonial literature.

SECTION D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words. *(10x2=20)*

38. Critically analyse how *The Lion and the Jewel* explores the tension between tradition and modernity. How does Soyinka use satire to highlight this conflict?

39. Examine the theme of hybrid identity in postcolonial literature, with reference to " A Far Cry from Africa."

40. Analyse how *The Empire Writes Back* redefines postcolonial identity and challenges Eurocentric literary traditions.

41. How does postcolonial literature redefine history and give space to suppressed voices? Use examples to support your answer.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കൂരിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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Regional Centres

Kozhikode
Govt. Arts and Science College
Meenchantha, Kozhikode,
Kerala, Pin: 673002
Ph: 04952920228
email: rckdirector@sgou.ac.in

Thalassery
Govt. Brennen College
Dharmadam, Thalassery,
Kannur, Pin: 670106
Ph: 04902990494
email: rctdirector@sgou.ac.in

Tripunithura
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Tripunithura, Ernakulam,
Kerala, Pin: 682301
Ph: 04842927436
email: rcedirector@sgou.ac.in

Pattambi
Sree Neelakanta Govt. Sanskrit College
Pattambi, Palakkad,
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Ph: 04662912009
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POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURES

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SGOU

Sreenarayanaguru Open University
Kollam, Kerala Pin- 691601, email: info@sgou.ac.in, www.sgou.ac.in Ph: +91 474 2966841

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