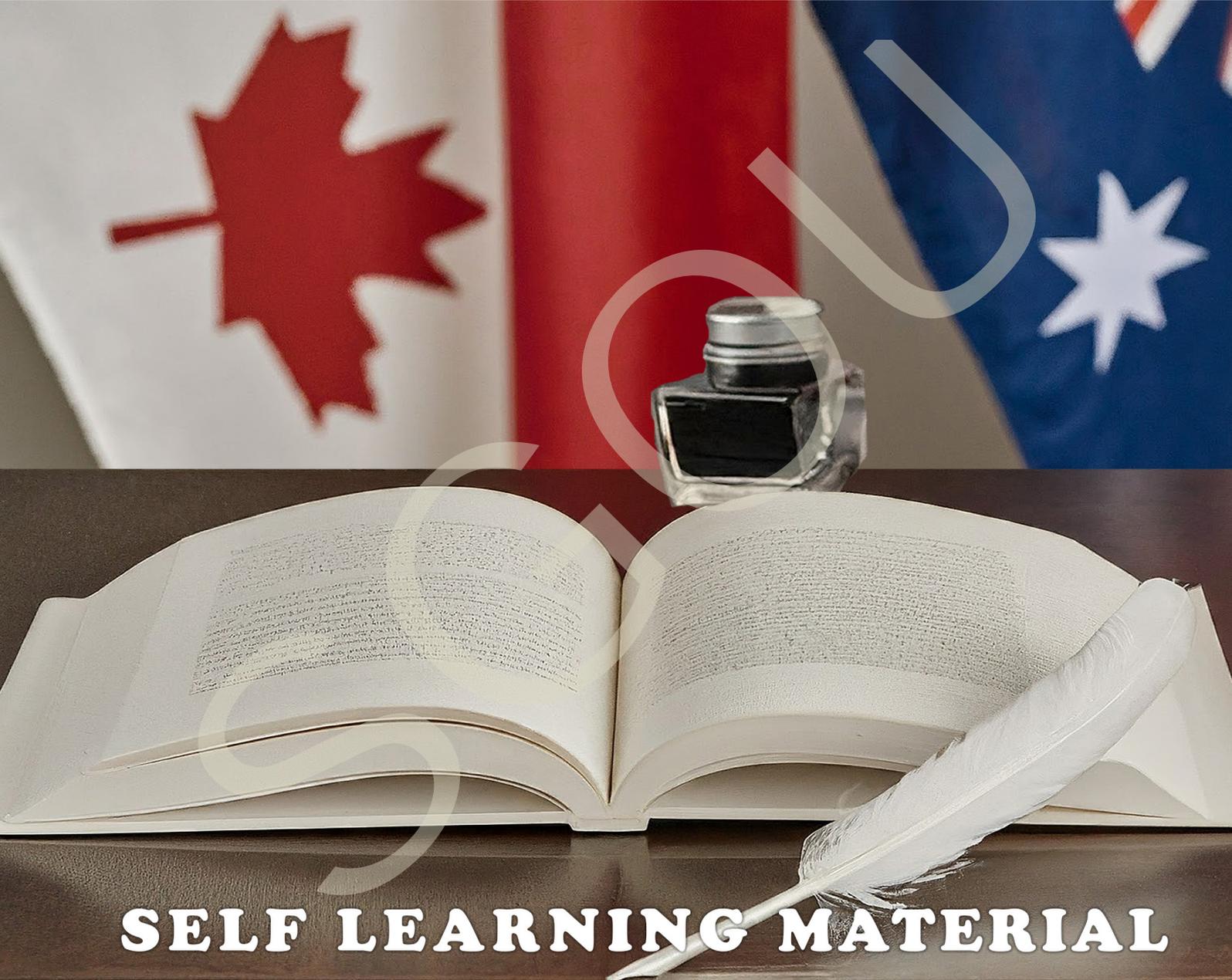


CANADIAN AND AUSTRALIAN LITERATURES

COURSE CODE: M21EG02DE

Postgraduate Programme in English
Discipline Specific Elective 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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To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Canadian and Australian Literatures

Course Code: M21EG02DE

Semester - III

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Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centres around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India. His name is a reminder for us to ensure quality in the delivery of all academic endeavours.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities. The PG programme in English Language and Literature is benchmarked with similar programmes of other state universities in Kerala. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

The University is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The Self Learning Materials have been drawn up with a very clear prescription. It recognizes the autonomy of an adult learner and a journey through the treasures of the curriculum structured with provisions for interactive learning, interrogative reflections on the content and didactic discussion through illustrative scenarios. The University takes a strong position that the learner is to be engaged in a dialogue with the content and the materials are shaped to elicit reflections in the form of questions. The questions of the learner are considered to be the vital milestones in the pedagogy of the system of the University as well as the trajectory of the learner's progression. I would like to request you to bestow your personal attention in generating questions after having an intense dialogue with the content, as it has connection with the internal assessment.

Feel free to write to us about anything that you feel relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,
Dr. P. M. Mubarak Pasha

01.03.2024

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Socio-political and Literary Context

BLOCK-01

Block Content

Unit 1 Founding of Colonies and Impact of Colonisation in Canada and Australia

Unit 2 Immigration, Diaspora, and Indigenous Histories in Canada and Australia

Unit 1

Founding of Colonies and Impact of Colonisation in Canada and Australia

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ get an insight into the popularity and influence of Australian and Canadian literature
- ▶ get an understanding of how sociocultural settings influence literary experiences
- ▶ examine ideas such as multiculturalism, national culture, diversity, and ethnicity
- ▶ critically analyse the process of decolonisation

Background

Canada and Australia, both former British colonies, share some similarities in their socio-cultural and literary contexts while also exhibiting distinct differences shaped by their unique histories, geographies, and indigenous cultures.

Canada is known for its multiculturalism and diversity, with a significant portion of its population being immigrants or descendants of immigrants from various parts of the world. The country has two official languages, English and French, reflecting its colonial history and the presence of a sizable Francophone population, particularly in Quebec. Indigenous peoples, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, have a profound cultural and historical presence in Canada. Issues related to indigenous rights, reconciliation, and cultural preservation are significant themes in Canadian society. Canada is characterised by its vast and diverse landscapes, including dense forests, expansive prairies, and rugged coastlines which influence its cultural identity and artistic expressions.

Canadian literature reflects the country's multiculturalism and bilingualism, with authors writing in English and French exploring diverse themes and perspectives. Indigenous literature has gained prominence, with writers such as Thomas King, Eden Robinson, and Richard Wagamese contributing to the rich tapestry of Canadian letters by exploring indigenous experiences and histories. Themes of identity, belonging, and the Canadian landscape often feature prominently in Canadian literature, with authors like Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, and Michael Ondaatje achieving international acclaim.

Like Canada, Australia is a culturally diverse nation shaped by immigration, with a significant portion of its population being immigrants or descendants of immigrants from various countries. Indigenous Australians, comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have inhabited the continent for tens of thousands of years. Issues related to indigenous rights, land ownership, and cultural recognition are central to Australian society. Australia's geography, characterised by its vast deserts, tropical forests, and coastal regions, influences its cultural identity and lifestyle, with outdoor activities playing a significant role in Australian culture. Australian literature reflects the country's unique history, landscape, and cultural diversity. Writers such as Patrick White, David Malouf, and Peter Carey have explored themes of Australian identity, colonialism, and multiculturalism.

Indigenous Australian literature has experienced a renaissance, with authors like Kim Scott, Alexis Wright, and Anita Heiss contributing to a growing body of work that celebrates indigenous culture and challenges colonial narratives. The Australian bush, with its rugged beauty and harsh realities, often serves as a backdrop for Australian literature, influencing themes of survival, mateship, and the relationship between humanity and nature.

While Canada and Australia share certain socio-cultural and literary characteristics, each nation possesses its own distinct cultural heritage and literary traditions shaped by its history, geography, and indigenous cultures.

Keywords

Colonialism, Multiculturalism, First Nation, Aboriginal Australia, The Australian bush

Discussion

1.1.1 The Founding of the Colonies of Canada and Australia

Canada is a member of the English-speaking Commonwealth. It has also had to accept its special place on the subcontinent of North America. The literary traditions of Canada originate from the United States, England, and France. As far as its documented history is concerned, the country is new. Canada, which has been inhabited by native people since prehistoric times,



► Origin of Canadian literature

welcomed European settlers in the sixteenth century. Conflicts between French and English settlers in North America persisted sporadically until 1759, when Britain took complete possession of the region. The American Revolution that followed made Canada's unique situation clear. It was defined by a desire to forge an independent identity, akin to that of the United States, on the one hand, and a sense of allegiance to Britain, the mother nation, on the other. Because the country has had to gaze across its southern boundary and eastern seaboard, its history thus exhibits strains of both continuity and break. Similar tendencies have also been seen in its early English writing, albeit briefly. However, Canadian writing had already begun to develop a voice that embodied boldness and assertion by the early nineteenth century. The literary effort of the twentieth century, particularly in its second half, demonstrates creative persistence and variety. As the country advances in its pursuit of modernity, Canadian literature can be observed to have transformed towards the end of the century into positions marked by development, coherence, and selfhood.

► Early histories of Canadian literature

Early Canadian literary histories served as a catalyst for the development of the canon. The majority of these sprang from the nation's extra-literary conception of the "Canadian-ness" of writing produced there. The nation's spiritual and political evolution, as well as the construction of literature and the canon, were all examined by the early literary historians. The literary works produced in Canada in the past have deliberately risen above these limitations by aiming to reach a global audience.

► Discovery of the land of Australia

Similarly, the world's smallest continent and largest island, Australia, was declared to be uninhabited territory in 1788 by Captain James Cook and the British. The native Australian population had been residing there for thousands of years before this. In New South Wales, the British established a prison colony. Other colonies of the British Empire later added were Tasmania (1825), Western Australia (1829), South Australia (1836), Victoria (1851), and Queensland (1859). Each state had its own constitution prior to the states' decision on January 26, 1901, to join and form a federation under the Commonwealth of Australia.

► Concept of the bicentenary celebrations

The Bicentenary "celebrations" of 1988 prompted substantial inquiries into the portrayal of Australia's nationhood origins across history, literature, and popular culture. The commemoration of January 26 as Australia Day or Foundation Day (coinciding with India's celebration of Republic Day) and

- ▶ The history of Australian narrative

the acknowledgment of 1988 as the Bicentenary of the arrival of the first settlers have elicited varied responses. These reactions have underscored the complexities inherent in presuming a singular, unified national identity for Australia.

One cornerstone of Australia's historical narrative is its inclination to begin with the arrival of the British, thereby overlooking the pre-existing histories of the Aboriginal people on the continent before 1788. This oversight serves to complicate the authentic essence of Australia's colonisation. The advent of the British is portrayed in traditional white histories as a kind and tranquil settlement. This defence of colonisation that it was the "white man's burden" to spread civilisation and culture throughout the world is coming under scrutiny and revision. Recent histories make an effort to demonstrate how racism permeated colonisation, which resulted in the invasion of Aboriginal territory and the methodical eradication of Aboriginal cultures. These contested narratives were brought to the forefront during the Bicentenary celebrations and remain subjects of ongoing debate.

- ▶ The concept of *terra nullius* or "empty land"

Arthur Philip used the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*, or "empty land," to support his contention that Australia was a British dominion. After being deemed uninhabitable, the territory was added to the British Empire. This made it possible to portray an act of brutal conquest as a peaceful settlement. At that point, the Aborigines were thought to have inhabited the area for at least 40,000 years. The Aborigines' time of dispossession, sickness, and cultural ruin began with the advent of the British.

1.1.2 Compulsions in Canada and Australia

- ▶ Initial settlement in Canada

Loyalists from the United States moved in large numbers to Canada as a result of the American War of Independence's victory. In addition to uniting the French- and English-speaking regions of Canada against the expansionist goals of the newly formed United States, the War of 1812 encouraged internal differentiation and readjustment. Due to the Napoleonic Wars, a large number of Europeans migrated to Canada, with fresh waves of settlers moving into the sparsely populated western regions. The competition between the French and the British raged beneath the surface of seeming peace. This resulted in regular clashes between the French and English-speaking communities until 1837. In the end, this led to Lord Durham's Report of 1839, which cleared the path for accountable



governance. Confederation was achieved in 1867 after a number of conventions. This referred to the founding of the Dominion of Canada, which at first included the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Over time, several provinces joined this confederation; Newfoundland was the last to do so in 1949. The ten provinces and federal government that make up modern-day Canada were not yet established when the national flag was approved in 1975.

► Colonisation of Australia

Following the invasion and subsequent colonisation of Australia, the British Crown gained administrative control over the land through the colonial governor. He had authority over land purchases, leases, and settlement. Land was leased for development to free settlers and ex-convicts. The Aborigines, who are the true landowners, were totally disregarded in this procedure. The legal, historical, and cultural discourses of Australian nationhood did not comprehend or take into consideration the land's profound spiritual and material significance within Aboriginal traditions.

► The notion of “Stolen Generation”

The British colonisers, perceiving themselves as custodians of culture and civilisation, utilised their biased views of the Aborigines to rationalise their inhumane treatment of them. The 1980 publication of the National Inquiry report, which detailed Australia's abhorrent history of racial control and cultural extermination or destruction, brought attention to the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. It covered the accounts and documentation of the Aboriginal children known as the “Stolen Generation,” who were taken from their families and raised in foster homes or orphanages run by white people in an attempt to assimilate them into the mainstream values and culture of mainstream white Australia. The narratives of this generation have exposed how hidden histories can challenge the assumptions and strategies underpinning the creation and marketing of national identities to the general public. These stories are a part of the biography revolution in Aboriginal writing. There is a terrible history of killings that occurred during frontier wars involving European settlers and Aboriginal people. The history of massacres during frontier conflicts between Aborigines and white settlers is troubling, as is the even more horrific history of cultural genocide perpetrated through government policies. These atrocities cast doubt on the integrity of the culture and civilisation values that the settlers supposedly held precious.

It is therefore not unexpected that, up until recently, the

- ▶ Focus on the history of Australia's white population

majority of writing on Australia focused on the history of the country's white population. These histories presented the settlers' experiences from their point of view and gave the false impression that no one had ever lived in Australia prior to the arrival of the Europeans, leading to the notion that the continent was still uncharted territory, known as *Terra Nullius* (empty) and *Terra Australis Incognita* (unknown).

1.1.3 The Ties with Europe

In both Canada and Australia, ties with Europe have played significant roles in shaping their socio-political contexts, albeit in different ways due to variations in their colonial histories and present-day relationships.

- ▶ Colonial legacy and British influence

Canada's ties with Europe trace back to its colonial past, primarily with France and Britain. The French colonisation of Canada, particularly in Quebec, has left a lasting cultural and linguistic imprint, evident in Quebec's distinct Francophone identity and its legal system based on civil law. Canada's status as a British colony until the late 19th century deeply influenced its political, legal, and societal structures. Even after gaining independence, Canada maintained close ties with Britain, remaining a part of the Commonwealth and recognising the British monarch as the head of state.

- ▶ Immigration and trade

European immigration, particularly from countries like the United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, and Germany, has significantly contributed to Canada's demographic makeup. European immigrants have played crucial roles in shaping Canadian society, economy, and culture, contributing to its multicultural identity. Canada maintains strong economic and diplomatic ties with European countries. The European Union (EU) is one of Canada's largest trading partners, and both regions collaborate on various international issues, including climate change, security, and human rights.

- ▶ Cultural heritage and British influence

Like Canada, Australia was colonised by European powers, primarily Britain. British colonisation profoundly impacted Australia's socio-political landscape, leading to the displacement and marginalisation of Indigenous Australians and the establishment of British institutions and legal systems. European culture, particularly British culture, has played a dominant role in shaping Australia's societal norms, language, and governance structures. The Westminster system of government, English as the official language, and common law legal traditions are all inherited from Britain.



► Concept of immigration and trade

European migration, especially following World War II, significantly contributed to Australia's population growth and cultural diversity. European immigrants, including those from the United Kingdom, Italy, Greece, and Eastern Europe, have made substantial contributions to Australia's economic development and cultural landscape. Australia maintains close economic ties with Europe, particularly with countries in the European Union. The EU is one of Australia's largest trading partners and a crucial destination for Australian exports, particularly agricultural products and raw materials. Australia also collaborates with European nations on various diplomatic initiatives, including security, counter-terrorism, and regional stability.

In summary, both Canada and Australia have deep and multifaceted ties with Europe stemming from their colonial histories, immigration patterns, cultural influences, and diplomatic relations. These ties continue to shape their socio-political contexts and contribute to their identities as modern, multicultural nations.

1.1.4 Native Cultures During Contact with Europeans in Canada and Australia

It was inhabited by the Inuit and Native Americans before the arrival of the European settlers. It was in this rough, largely unpopulated country that the white men first appeared, in 1497, during the Italian explorer John Cabot's voyage across the Gulf of St. Lawrence. White communities were first established along the Eastern Seaboard, serving as military garrisons or trading centres. The French and British were inspired to found these towns by imperialist aims. The French were the dominant imperial race up until the seventeenth century, although conflicts between the two were unavoidable due to colonial aspirations. After the French were routed in 1759, the majority of settled North America was occupied by the British. This situation persisted for a little while until the American War of Independence in 1775. With areas in Canada that opted to support the British rather than the US, it put the country in an odd situation. These communities aspired to live according to modified British social and political customs, but they were hesitant to completely break away from and become independent of the mother country. The social, political, and psychological underpinnings of what finally came to be known as the Canadian nation were established by this trend.

► Inhabitants before the arrival of the European settlers

For just over fifty years, convicts were transported, and Ian



- ▶ Transportation of the convicts during the period

Turner records that “150,000 men and women came to Australia in chains” during that time. Due to the transportation policy, the majority of the British immigrants who settled in these colonies in the early years were a diverse group, primarily from the lower echelons of British society at the time.

- ▶ The awareness about early inhabitants in Australia

Apart from the incarcerated, the remaining population was made up of military and government servants who oversaw the prison colony’s management. The socioeconomic structure of the time did not provide the affluent nobility in Britain, who were the writers, readers, and sponsors of literature with significant representation. Furthermore, the early colony residents who had benefited in some way from the cultural advantages of education and greater social standing focused their attention and efforts first on surviving and then on being wealthy.

- ▶ The state in the first two decades of the 19th century

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, free settlers began to overtake members of the Penal System as the ones who set the socio-cultural pace of this Antipodean British colony, and changes were evident in white Australian culture. Large tracts of land were given over to the pastoral sector, which was focused on meeting the needs of the British textile industry by exporting sheep, after it was realised that the land could support this kind of activity. The officers in the New South Wales Corps launched off this tendency, which quickly sparked a string of investigations and the formation of additional colonies in locations including Melbourne, Adelaide, and Swan River. Towns were established as a result of the expanding pastoral business up until the 1840s economic downturn. When waves of immigrants swept Australia’s beaches in search of the valuable yellow metal during the 1850s gold rush, more obvious shifts in population patterns resulted.

- ▶ Discovery of gold rush

When news of a discovery near Bathurst was released in 1851, the gold rush got underway. Large gold discoveries were soon discovered in Victoria at Bendigo, Ballarat, and Clunes. Subsequent discoveries in Queensland resulted in the migration of immigrants and other individuals. Workers in Australian colonies and immigrants from beyond the island continent flooded in after hearing about these findings. According to Turner, “Within the two gold decades, the population of the Australian colonies grew fourfold” (23). Up until then, about 50% of the population was descended from or had ancestors who were prisoners. Ultimately, the gold rush phenomenon brought manpower and wealth from overseas to Australian colonies. “A sense of permanence to the occupation of the land;



the startlingly rapid, yet solid, growth of the colonial capitals provided a new pivot for colonial society,” wrote Turner of these newfound riches.

► Rise of the market of books

An increase in general literacy led to a rise in the market for popular books. The early Australian writers were constrained, nevertheless, by the small readerships in their own country to publish exclusively in Australian journals and newspapers; they had to turn to London publishing firms for book publication. Among the first writers to write about Australian life and landscape were Marcus Clarke, who wrote about the penal system, Boldrewood, who set his works in the Bush, and Catherine Spence, who occasionally focused on the towns. Their writing was characterised by imitation of the English literary heritage and a desire to fit in. Their impact on metropolitan Australian culture was thus minimal, but what was uniquely Australian about this writing struck a chord with the recently literate bush people.

► The idea of Australian Nationhood

As socialism, unionism, and nationalism gained traction in the 1890s, the idea of Australian nationhood started to take shape. It started to seem possible that the six colonies might be viewed as a single nation. The Australian Constitution was approved by a referendum in 1898. The Old World became disconnected from the rest of the world due to distance and isolation. By the 1900s, the federation movement had gained traction and given nationalism a fresh perspective in Australia, where the majority of the inhabitants of the continent’s six colonies were native-born. All of the states joined the Federation in 1900, when an Act creating the Commonwealth of Australia was enacted by the British Parliament. 1901 saw the Federal Constitution proclaimed and the first national election, which resulted in the first Federal Parliament’s beginning on May 9. In this year, the ‘White Australia’ Policy was also implemented as a law that forbade non-Europeans from settling there permanently.

► The rise of authorship in Australia

The Australian publishing landscape had also evolved by the 1900s. Numerous authors from this era were born in Australia. Neither their inclination to suit the interests of the British reading public nor their ties to the metropolitan hub were particularly strong. Beginning with Banjo Patterson’s *The Man from Snowy River* in 1895, the publishing house Angus and Robertson began routinely publishing works by Australian writers in addition to *The Bulletin*, *The Worker*, and other publications that published their work.

1.1.5 The Effects of European Contact in Canada and Australia

The effects of European contact in Canada have been profound and have shaped the course of Canadian history in various ways, such as

▶ The decline in population

▶ European contact brought diseases such as smallpox, measles, and influenza to indigenous populations that had no immunity to these diseases. This resulted in devastating population declines among indigenous communities, with some estimates suggesting that up to 90% of the indigenous population may have perished due to disease in the centuries following contact.

▶ Colonisation and Land Dispossession

▶ European contact led to the colonisation of indigenous lands. European powers asserted sovereignty over these lands through treaties, conquest, and colonisation, often resulting in the displacement and dispossession of indigenous people from their traditional territories. This process was accompanied by the establishment of European settlements, the imposition of colonial governance structures, and the exploitation of indigenous resources.

▶ Cultural Transformation

▶ European contact brought about significant cultural changes among indigenous people. This included the adoption of European technologies, goods, and practices, as well as the introduction of Christianity. At the same time, indigenous cultures were often suppressed or marginalised by colonial authorities, leading to the erosion of traditional ways of life and the loss of languages, customs, and spiritual practices.

▶ Economic Exploitation

▶ European contact facilitated the exploitation of indigenous resources, particularly fur, timber, and later minerals and natural gas. Indigenous people were often exploited as labourers in resource extraction industries, such as the fur trade and later mining and logging operations. This economic exploitation contributed to the impoverishment and marginalisation of indigenous communities.



► Social Disruption

► Legal and Political Inequality

- It further disrupted indigenous social structures and relations. Traditional governance systems were often undermined or replaced by European-style governance structures imposed by colonial authorities. This led to social tensions, conflicts, and power struggles within indigenous communities as they adapted to the changes brought about by European contact.
- The contact also established legal and political systems that marginalised indigenous people and denied them full citizenship and rights. Indigenous people were often excluded from political decision-making processes and denied the same legal protections and rights as European settlers. This legacy of legal and political inequality continues to shape indigenous-settler relations in Canada today.

Overall, European contact in Canada had far-reaching and enduring effects on indigenous people and their societies. These effects continue to be felt today and are central to discussions of reconciliation, indigenous rights, and the ongoing struggle for justice and self-determination.

► Consequence of the seclusion of bush settlers

In Australia, the seclusion of the bush settlements was broken and the cultural divide between urban and rural areas was reduced with the development of railroads, a state school network, speedier communication networks, and agricultural mechanisation. Soon, a lot of authors started to follow similar patterns and produce increasingly formulaic stories of humour, romance, or adventure to cater to the emerging Australian paperback publishers like the New South Wales Bookstall Company. Although the writers of this genre and era continued to make strong statements about nationalism and social reform, their middle-class upbringing and advanced education caused them to seek out the intellectual atmosphere of the metropolis.

► Involvement of Australia in World War I

Australia's involvement in World War I (1914–18) and the Gallipoli tragedy, in which several Australian and New Zealand soldiers lost their lives while fighting in Europe under British rule, had a significant role in shaping the country's identity apart from Britain. By 1931, about one-third of Australia's workforce was unemployed as a result of the Great Depression that clouded the interwar years. Another significant event in the history of the country was World War II (1939–1945), which brought the battlegrounds closer to the Antipodes as a result of Japan's

threat. It sped up industrialisation, and made Australia more cognizant of its Asian identity as well as its alliances with the United States. These trends came together during the Vietnam War in 1965, and their effects on the country and its process of forging a national identity were predicted. The postwar wave of immigration from Asia and Southern Europe prepared the ground for a shift in national consciousness and social policy towards a more multicultural paradigm.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the land's characteristics had a significant impact on the history of the settlers. It also had an impact on the newly arrived people's cultural awareness. The land emerged as the primary element against which the settlers' identities could be shaped. By the end of the 1800s, early settlers' writings in Australia had formalised the mythologies associated with the new land. The weekly *Bulletin* and the settlers' experiences fuelled the creation of the mythology that associated the area with the first white settlers.

► Features of the land

Additionally, the early writers had to come up with new techniques to depict the island-continent's radically different landscape and mood. There, summer peaked in December and winter in June due to the reversal of the seasons. The animals and flora also appeared to be very distinct from anything found in the city. Thus, antipodean inversion evolved into a means of communicating the strangeness of the place.

► New techniques developed by early writers in Australia

Australian folklore, bush lore, and pioneer myths have recently come under fire for being perceived as sexist due to their emphasis on the masculine perspective and failure to capture the realities of settlers' interactions with Aboriginal people. Additionally, in the multicultural age, they are no longer regarded as appropriate emblems for the Australian identity.

► Emphasis on ancient Australian folklore, bush lore and pioneer myths

1.1.6 Colonisation in Canada and Australia

Canada's colonisation involved both British and French powers. The French established colonies primarily in what is now Quebec and parts of the Maritimes, while the British established colonies along the Atlantic coast and later expanded westward. The fur trade was a significant driver of colonisation in Canada, with French and British traders establishing relationships with indigenous people to exchange fur pelts for European goods. This led to the establishment of trading posts and alliances with indigenous nations.

► Canada's British and French colonisation



- ▶ Expansion of British colonisation in Canada

As British colonisation expanded, treaties were negotiated with indigenous nations to acquire land for settlement and resource extraction. However, many of these treaties were unfair and disregarded indigenous rights, leading to conflicts and dispossession of indigenous lands. The Canadian government implemented assimilation policies, including the establishment of residential schools, to forcibly assimilate indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture. These schools aimed to eradicate indigenous languages, cultures, and identities, leading to intergenerational trauma and loss of cultural heritage.

- ▶ British colonisation in Australia and violent dispossession

Australia was colonised primarily by the British, who established penal colonies starting with the arrival of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788. British colonisation led to the displacement and marginalisation of Aboriginal people, who had inhabited the continent for tens of thousands of years. British colonisation in Australia involved violent conflicts with Aboriginal people, as settlers sought to establish colonies, and exploit natural resources. Massacres, forced removals, and the introduction of diseases devastated Aboriginal communities and disrupted traditional ways of life.

- ▶ Various assimilation policies in Australia

Similar to Canada, Australia implemented assimilation policies aimed at eradicating Aboriginal cultures and assimilating indigenous people into European-Australian society. These policies included the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families, known as the Stolen Generations. Aboriginal land rights have been a central issue in Australia since colonisation, with indigenous people fighting for recognition of their traditional lands and native title rights. Landmark legal cases, such as the Mabo decision in 1992, have recognised indigenous land rights and paved the way for reconciliation efforts.

- ▶ Legacies of colonisation

In summary, colonisation in Canada and Australia led to significant impacts on indigenous people, including dispossession of land, loss of culture and identity, and enduring socio-economic disparities. While both countries have made efforts towards reconciliation and recognition of indigenous rights, the legacies of colonisation continue to shape their societies and relationships with indigenous people.

1.1.7 Effect of Colonisation in Canada and Australia

Waves of foreign immigrants began to arrive at the turn of the century. Conditions and time came together to create new and intriguing viewpoints in the creative arts. Canadian writing of

► Waves of foreign immigrants

the twentieth century is distinguished by this new perspective, which aims to reexamine and alter the previous impulses and creative reactions. Many Canadian writers bemoaned the lack of a critical environment and emphasised how strict it is to evaluate its literature using a more critical lens. Writing was fundamentally criticised for its disregard for individual intelligence, which made it appear weaker. Such literature could never verify that fundamental modernist element that is concerned with actual experience since it fails to stimulate the mind. Because of this, it was outside the purview of modernism. The primary cause of this was a variety of restrictive ideologies that took the form of colonialism, provincialism, and puritanism in Canada.

► Revolutionary turn during the first two decades of the twentieth century

The course of events had taken a revolutionary turn during the first two decades of the twentieth century. These occurrences had prompted writers to reject conventional wisdom and go on a fresh, experimental, and creative route. Geographically, the surrounding areas of Montreal gave way to Toronto as the centre of focused and localised literary activity.

► Style of writings

The militant writing of the 1930s and 1940s was violent, dogmatic, and revolting against society to a degree never seen in Canadian literature. Another style that ran against early modernism's fiercely realistic writing emerged in the 1950s. Particularly in the area of critique, this new writing demonstrated a blend of strength, simplicity, sympathy, and intelligence as the guiding principles. The writers and critics established the groundwork for the development of Canadian schools of criticism by highlighting the importance of a critical perspective in literary evaluation. As the 1950s came to a conclusion, fresh viewpoints took precedence over previous inclinations. They aimed to draw attention to a particular strain of modernism that was realist and urban at the same time. They supported high standards of craftsmanship as well as the ideals of artistic purity and freedom.

► New wave of Canadian writing

This new wave of Canadian writing was typified by a confident and exuberant style. The nation's literary movement aimed to define new boundaries for itself by eschewing the remnants of Victoriana, particularly in the area of evaluating and judging literature. As a result, a writer's existence within the context of modern time and space was acknowledged. Views of a place were valued considerably more highly than the place itself, and thus had a widespread impact on the writer's conception of reality rather than the actual world.

- ▶ Concept of *gemeinschaft*

The pre-1950s period is best represented as a *gemeinschaft*, or discourse that was typified by a bygone era of village communes that gave way to the contemporary *gesellschaft*, or discourse of a group of dispersed individuals inside a market system. It is clear that the canon from the 1950s onwards had a strong tendency to carve out a place for itself given the rise of new critical and theoretical viewpoints on Canadian literature.

- ▶ Garrison mentality of the Canadian life reflected in their writings

The garrison mentality evolved in tandem with the centre of Canadian life shifting from the fortress to the city. It started out as a statement of the moral principles that were widely acknowledged, but as society grew more complex and environment-aware, it started to resemble a revolutionary outpost inside a metropolis. The paradoxical superimposition of large empty areas and the lack of privacy from nosy, greedy eyes is a recurring theme in Canadian literature. As a result, writing had a tone of profound anxiety connected to men's souls, which showed up as fears emblematic of oppressive morality. Writing centred on the legacy of moral and political dilemmas and disappointments. In the 1960s, Canadian writers were drawn to topics of this kind.

- ▶ The new literary environment

The new literary environment valued debate and critical analysis highly. In the past, criticism had a preference for viewpoints that were author-centric, thematic, and socially conscious; these days, it mostly concentrates on structural and technical analysis. A poetics that considered nationhood in addition to philosophy predominated during the 1970s. There were more adjustments in the next two decades, giving up on the elite culture's fortress in favour of experimenting with a fictitious wilderness. It was centred on forging an identity that required dedication to actualise, not to a philosophy or cause, but to a selfless way of living. This perspective on life emphasises the value of a symbolic death into life, which is affirmed and celebrated in all great art.

- ▶ Inclination of Canadian literature

It was observed that Canadian literature tended towards metafiction, or the process of establishing order out of myth and art. It involves examining the connections between the discourses of art and the systems of social and cultural power on the one hand, and between art (and language) and reality on the other.

Different fields such as philosophy, linguistics, history, sociology, literary criticism, and psychoanalysis are brought together in the new postmodern theoretical framework of

- ▶ Various fields of study put together in the postmodern framework

reference. In the contest of these, the writer, the reader, and the text must meet. This is emphasised again in Canadian postmodern literature when it discusses topics like immigration, feminism, and ethnicity. The focus on regionalism in literature has been transformed by this writing into an appreciation of the unique, the local, and the special. Canadian authors transform the regional realist into a postmodern hybrid. This is accomplished by opposing authority in nationalist politics, gender politics, and indigenous affairs. The 1990s saw a focus on dismembering universality and conveying variety in Canadian writing. Criticism made the most impressive attempt in this direction. The literary movement in Canada has received support from a variety of extra-literary sources and has received impetus in different forms. These include the publishing sector, the state's cultural policy, and the function that journals and small periodicals perform.

- ▶ Dispossession of land and displacement

The effects of colonisation in Australia have been profound and enduring, significantly impacting indigenous people, culture, society, and the landscape. British colonisation led to the widespread dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their traditional lands. The British claimed ownership of the continent under the doctrine of terra nullius, ignoring indigenous land tenure systems and forcibly taking control of Aboriginal territories. Colonisation brought violent conflicts between European settlers and indigenous people, resulting in massacres, frontier wars, and forced removals. These violent encounters devastated Aboriginal communities, led to the loss of life, and disrupted traditional ways of life.

- ▶ Loss of culture and language; social and economic disparities

Colonisation had a devastating impact on Aboriginal cultures and languages. Assimilation policies, including the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families (the Stolen Generations), aimed to eradicate indigenous languages, cultures, and identities. This resulted in the loss of cultural knowledge, practices, and intergenerational trauma. Besides, colonisation entrenched social and economic disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians face higher rates of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and poor health outcomes compared to the non-Indigenous population. These disparities are rooted in historical injustices, ongoing discrimination, and limited access to resources and opportunities.

Colonisation introduced diseases to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had no immunity, leading to

- ▶ Cultural resilience and resistance

- ▶ Land rights struggles

- ▶ The effects of colonisation in Australia

- ▶ Notion of Rebellions of 1837-1838

- ▶ Idea of Northwest Resistance

devastating epidemics that decimated indigenous populations. Additionally, the disruption of traditional lifestyles, loss of land, and social marginalisation contribute to poor health outcomes among indigenous Australians today. Despite the profound impacts of colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have demonstrated remarkable resilience and resistance. Indigenous communities continue to maintain and revitalise cultural practices, languages, and connections to land, asserting their rights and identities in the face of ongoing challenges.

The struggle for land rights has been central to indigenous activism in Australia since colonisation. Landmark legal cases, such as the Mabo decision in 1992, recognised native title rights to traditional lands, challenging the doctrine of terra nullius and providing avenues for indigenous land claims and reconciliation efforts.

Overall, the effects of colonisation in Australia continue to shape the experiences and realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, highlighting the ongoing legacy of historical injustices and the importance of addressing issues of land rights, cultural preservation, and social justice.

1.1.8 Revolts in Canada and Australia

Revolutionary movements and revolts in Canada and Australia have significantly influenced their respective socio-political contexts, albeit in different ways due to variations in their colonial histories, governance structures, and indigenous relations. Some notable revolts within the socio-political contexts of each country:

Rebellions of 1837–1838: In Upper and Lower Canada (present-day Ontario and Quebec), discontent with British colonial rule and political grievances led to armed uprisings known as the Rebellions of 1837–1838. The rebels, consisting of various groups including French-speaking Canadians and English-speaking reformers, sought democratic reforms, responsible government, and socio-economic justice. Although the rebellions were ultimately suppressed by British authorities, they paved the way for constitutional reforms and the eventual establishment of responsible government in Canada.

Northwest Resistance (1885): The Northwest Resistance, also known as the North-West Rebellion, was a rebellion led by Métis leader Louis Riel and First Nations leaders against the Canadian government's encroachment on indigenous lands and

rights in present-day Saskatchewan and Alberta. The rebellion highlighted grievances over land dispossession, broken treaty promises, and lack of indigenous representation in government. Although the rebellion was suppressed by government forces, it raised awareness of indigenous rights issues and contributed to ongoing struggles for recognition and reconciliation in Canada.

- ▶ Notion of Eureka Rebellion in Australia

Eureka Rebellion (1854): The Eureka Rebellion in Ballarat, Victoria, was a significant uprising against colonial authorities and injustices experienced by gold miners. Miners, including European immigrants and some indigenous Australians, rebelled against heavy taxation, lack of political representation, and oppressive mining regulations. The rebellion culminated in a violent confrontation at the Eureka Stockade, resulting in casualties on both sides. Although the rebellion was suppressed by government forces, it became a symbol of democratic rights and social justice in Australia, leading to reforms and increased political participation.

- ▶ Concept of Indigenous resistance and frontier wars

Indigenous Resistance and Frontier Wars: Across Australia, indigenous people engaged in resistance movements and guerrilla warfare against European colonisation and land dispossession. The Frontier Wars, lasting from the late 18th century to the early 20th century, involved numerous conflicts, massacres, and acts of resistance by Aboriginal groups defending their lands and cultures against colonial expansion. Although indigenous resistance movements were often fragmented and localized, they played a significant role in shaping colonial policies, indigenous relations, and Australian national identity.

- ▶ Revolutionary movements and revolts

In summary, revolutionary movements and revolts in Canada, and Australia have been integral to their socio-political development, reflecting diverse grievances, aspirations for democratic rights, and struggles against colonial oppression. These movements have contributed to constitutional reforms, increased political participation, and ongoing debates about indigenous rights, reconciliation, and social justice in both countries.

1.1.9 Canadian and Australian Allegiance to the British Crown

Canadian allegiance to the British Crown has evolved over time and is rooted in historical, constitutional, and cultural factors. It dates back to the country's colonial history. Canada was originally colonised by France and Britain, with British control becoming predominant following the Treaty of Paris in 1763.



► Historical context of the Canadian allegiance to the British Crown

Throughout the colonial period, Canada remained a part of the British Empire, with the British monarch serving as the head of state. The allegiance to the British Crown is enshrined in Canada's constitution. The Constitution Act, 1867, which established Canada as a self-governing dominion within the British Empire, recognised the British monarch as the formal head of state. This constitutional framework has been maintained, although the role of the monarch in Canadian governance has evolved over time, with the development of parliamentary democracy and the gradual assertion of Canadian sovereignty. The British monarch continues to play a symbolic and ceremonial role in Canadian society. The monarch is represented in Canada by the Governor General at the federal level and by Lieutenant Governors in each province. These representatives perform various ceremonial duties, such as opening sessions of Parliament, giving royal assent to legislation, and presenting honours and awards. Canada's allegiance to the British Crown is also reflected in the country's cultural heritage.

► Evolution of National identity and debates over the same

British traditions, customs, and symbols, including the monarchy, are part of Canada's cultural fabric, particularly in regions with strong historical ties to British colonisation, such as Ontario and British Columbia. However, Canada's cultural landscape is diverse and includes influences from many other ethnic and cultural groups. While allegiance to the British Crown remains a formal aspect of Canadian governance, Canada's national identity has evolved to encompass a broader sense of Canadian nationalism. As Canada has matured as a nation, there has been a growing emphasis on Canadian symbols, institutions, and values that reflect the country's unique history, geography, and multicultural character. The question of Canada's allegiance to the British Crown has been the subject of debate and discussion throughout Canadian history. Some Canadians advocate for maintaining ties to the monarchy as a symbol of continuity and tradition, while others argue for severing these ties and establishing a fully independent republican form of government. The issue remains a topic of ongoing debate and may continue to evolve in the future.

► Australian allegiance to the British crown

The issue of Australian allegiance to the British crown has been a significant and complex topic in Australian politics, with various implications and potential political fallout. Australia was initially colonised by the British Empire in the late 18th century, leading to the establishment of British colonial rule over the continent. This historical connection to Britain has deeply influenced Australian politics, society, and culture. Australia

operates as a constitutional monarchy, with the British monarch as the head of state. While the monarch's powers are largely ceremonial and symbolic, the issue of allegiance to the British crown remains a relevant aspect of Australian political identity.

- ▶ Longstanding republican movement

In addition to this, there has been a longstanding republican movement in Australia advocating for the country to become a republic, and sever its formal ties with the British monarchy. The debate over republicanism has sparked political divisions and debates over national identity and sovereignty. The issue of allegiance to the British crown has often been a divisive one in Australian politics, with varying levels of support for maintaining the monarchy or transitioning to a republic. Public opinion polls have shown fluctuations in support for republicanism over the years, influenced by factors such as generational shifts and prominent political events.

- ▶ Question of cultural identity and national pride

The debate over allegiance to the British crown has prompted discussions about constitutional reform in Australia. Proposals for transitioning to a republic have included considerations of the constitutional process for amending the Australian Constitution and the potential impact on Australia's political system. The issue of allegiance to the British crown can also have implications for Australia's international relations, particularly with Commonwealth countries and other nations with ties to the British monarchy. Any changes to Australia's constitutional arrangements could affect diplomatic relationships and international perceptions of the country. Beyond the political implications, the issue of allegiance to the British crown touches on questions of cultural identity and national pride in Australia. Debates over republicanism often involve discussions about Australian values, history, and aspirations for the future.

- ▶ Recent developments in the republican movement

In 1999, Australia held a referendum on whether to become a republic, but the proposal was ultimately rejected by voters. Since then, the republican movement has continued to advocate for change, although the issue has not been a central focus of recent political agendas. The debate over allegiance to the British crown remains relevant in Australian politics, with periodic discussions and renewed calls for constitutional reform. However, other pressing issues often take precedence in political discourse, leading to fluctuations in the intensity of the republican movement.

Overall, the issue of Australian allegiance to the British crown is a complex and multifaceted one that intersects with questions

- ▶ The debate over the allegiance to the British crown still continues

- ▶ Constitutional crises in Canada

- ▶ SNC-Lavalin scandal as an example of political fallout

- ▶ Legacy of Indian Residential schools in Canada

- ▶ Dismissal of Gough Whitlam as an important political fallout

of national identity, constitutional reform, and international relations. While the political fallout may vary depending on the context and prevailing sentiments, the debate over republicanism continues to shape Australian politics and society.

1.1.10 Political Fallouts in Canada and Australia

Both Canada and Australia have experienced various political fallouts throughout their histories, which have shaped their socio-political contexts in significant ways. Canada has faced several constitutional crises, including the Patriation of the Constitution in 1982. This process involved the Canadian government negotiating with provincial leaders to bring Canada's Constitution under Canadian control, resulting in the passage of the Constitution Act, 1982. However, the Quebec government under Premier René Lévesque did not agree to the final terms, leading to political tensions and the ongoing debate over Quebec sovereignty.

In 2019, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau faced a political fallout over the SNC-Lavalin scandal, in which allegations arose that members of the Prime Minister's Office pressured then-Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould to intervene in a criminal case against the Quebec-based engineering firm SNC-Lavalin. The scandal led to resignations within Trudeau's cabinet and raised questions about political interference and ethical conduct within the government.

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada has been a source of political fallout, particularly in recent years. The discovery of unmarked graves at former residential school sites has sparked national reckoning and demands for accountability from the Canadian government and churches involved in operating the schools. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and calls to action have prompted political responses aimed at addressing the ongoing impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities.

One of the most significant political fallouts in Australian history occurred in 1975 when Governor-General Sir John Kerr dismissed Prime Minister Gough Whitlam from office. The dismissal followed a protracted constitutional crisis over budgetary matters, which led to Whitlam's government being unable to secure supply in the Senate. The event sparked widespread controversy and debate over the powers of the Governor-General and the role of the monarchy in Australian

politics.

- ▶ Another example of fallout in Australia is leadership spills

Australia has experienced several instances of leadership spills within political parties, resulting in changes of Prime Minister outside of scheduled elections. For example, the Labor Party saw leadership spills in 2010, 2013, and 2019, leading to changes in leadership from Kevin Rudd to Julia Gillard, then to Rudd again, and finally to Bill Shorten. These leadership changes have often been accompanied by political instability and public disillusionment with the political process.

- ▶ Refugee policy controversies

Australia's immigration and refugee policies, including offshore detention and the controversial "Pacific Solution," have been sources of political fallout and international criticism. The treatment of asylum seekers, particularly those held in offshore detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru, has raised concerns about human rights violations, government secrecy, and the erosion of Australia's international reputation.

- ▶ Political fallouts in Canada and Australia

These examples illustrate how political fallouts in Canada and Australia have had far-reaching implications for governance, public trust in institutions, and societal dynamics, shaping the socio-political landscapes of both countries.

1.1.11 Confederation in Canada and Australia

- ▶ Significance of Confederation

The Confederation, which took place in 1867, is a turning point in Canadian history and can be seen as the event that started the country's historical and cultural clock. Poetry was the preferred genre in the early days, and British poetry was the source of the poetic aesthetic that governed it. Poetry was seen as a priceless artefact that demonstrated the intimate relationship between the material and spiritual realms. This communion represented the nation's absorption into itself through the juxtaposition and merging of spiritual, political, cultural, and historical realities. This stage is distinguished by the unusual mentality that emerged and took part in the process of nation-building. This is reflected in Canadian literary history, where works written before Confederation that do not capture the spirit of the people's struggle for independence are pushed to the canonical periphery and considered incidental or merely informational. Writing that conveys a sense of authority in describing transcontinental travel, exploration, or local details is highly valued, serving as a literary counterpart to political and physical control over the environment. Because of the

connection of their creative development with the political will and character of the populace, the writers of the Confederation generation thereafter come to occupy canonical prominence.

The historical circumstances that gave rise to Canada's sense of national identity and pride within the Canadian psyche were the country's existence in the face of the American Revolution's rejection by the Canadian Loyalists and America's defeat in the War of 1812. After emerging from a colonial derivative culture, Canadian writing tried to diverge and develop into a mature national identity. In this sense, maturity is not just a national trait but also a specific geographic, political, and cultural interpretation of a universal ideal. Writing that comes after and canonical studies serve as good examples of this tendency, which has its roots in the concern with national identity. By the end of the 1800s, Canadian writers were more interested in establishing the boundaries of the vast stretches of land that made up their nation and trying to find an emotional connection with it. Adherence to the Romantic, and Victorian literary patterns of the mother nation (England) was a typical trend observed in that era's literature. This tendency made the colonial chains still shackling the land all too evident.

► Sense of national identity

In the context of Australia, "Confederation" typically refers to the process through which six separate British colonies federated to form the Commonwealth of Australia. This occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, leading to the establishment of the modern Australian nation-state. The key events and socio-political context surrounding Confederation in Australia are as follows:

► Confederation

► Background of separate colonies

1. Before Confederation, Australia was comprised of six separate British colonies: New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania. Each colony had its own government, laws, and administration, although they shared certain institutions and ties to the British Empire.

► Movement towards federation

2. The idea of federating the Australian colonies into a single nation gained momentum in the late 19th century due to several factors. These included a growing sense of Australian nationalism, concerns about defense and security in the face of regional threats, and economic interests in promoting trade and commerce between the colonies.

3. In the 1890s, a series of constitutional conventions

► Constitutional conventions

► Drafting of the Constitution

► Referendums and approval

► Establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia

► Impact on socio-political Context

► Confederation in Australia

were held to draft a constitution for a federated Australia. Delegates from each colony participated in these conventions, negotiating key issues such as the distribution of powers between the federal government and the states, the structure of the federal parliament, and the protection of individual rights.

4. The resulting Constitution of Australia was drafted during these conventions, drawing inspiration from various sources including the British Westminster system and the United States Constitution. The constitution established a federal system of government with a bicameral parliament, a constitutional monarchy with the British monarch as head of state, and a High Court to adjudicate disputes.
5. Following the drafting of the constitution, referendums were held in each colony to seek approval for federation. Despite initial setbacks and opposition in some colonies, the referendums were ultimately successful, with the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania all voting in favour of federation.
6. On January 1, 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was formally established through the proclamation of the Australian Constitution. The new nation came into being, with Edmund Barton sworn in as the first Prime Minister and the federal parliament convening in Melbourne.
7. Confederation in Australia had significant socio-political implications, including the creation of a unified national identity, the transfer of certain powers from the colonial governments to the federal government, and the establishment of a framework for cooperation and coordination between the states. It also laid the foundation for Australia's evolution as a democratic, multicultural, and independent nation-state.

Overall, Confederation in Australia represented a milestone in the nation's history, marking the transition from separate colonies to a unified federation and shaping the socio-political landscape of modern Australia.

1.1.12 Issues of Alcoholism and Genocide

In Canadian society, issues like alcoholism and the historical mistreatment of Indigenous people, including instances of



- ▶ Effect of alcoholism on indigenous people

genocide, have left deep scars and continue to be subjects of reflection, examination, and reconciliation. Here's an overview of how these issues manifest in Canada. Alcoholism has disproportionately affected Indigenous communities in Canada. This issue has complex roots, including historical trauma, intergenerational impacts of colonisation, socio-economic disparities, and limited access to healthcare and support services. The prevalence of alcoholism in Indigenous communities is often intertwined with broader social issues such as poverty, substance abuse, mental health challenges, and cultural disconnection.

- ▶ Awareness and interventions to address alcoholism in Canada

Efforts to address alcoholism in Canada often involve a combination of awareness, education, and community-based interventions. Indigenous led initiatives focus on cultural revitalisation, healing programs, and advocacy for improved healthcare and social services. Additionally, there are non-profit organisations, government programs, and treatment centres dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by alcoholism across Canada.

- ▶ History of indigenous genocide

Canada has a history of colonial policies and actions that constitute genocide against Indigenous peoples. This includes forced removal from ancestral lands, cultural assimilation through institutions like residential schools, forced sterilisation, and the deliberate destruction of Indigenous cultures and languages. The impact of these genocidal policies continues to reverberate through Indigenous communities today, contributing to intergenerational trauma, socio-economic disparities, and challenges to cultural revitalisation.

- ▶ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

In recent years, there has been a growing acknowledgment of Canada's history of genocide against Indigenous people. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established to document the experiences of survivors of the residential school system and to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The TRC's calls to action include recommendations for addressing the ongoing impacts of genocide and fostering healing, justice, and reconciliation in Canadian society.

- ▶ Importance of addressing the issues like alcoholism and genocide

Addressing issues like alcoholism and genocide in Canada requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges historical injustices, promotes cultural revival and healing, and addresses systemic inequalities and barriers to wellness. By confronting these challenges with empathy, accountability, and a commitment to justice, Canadians can work towards building a more inclusive and equitable society for all.



- ▶ Establishing community-based support systems and rehabilitation programs

Similarly, addressing social, and cultural issues like alcoholism and the historical genocide of Indigenous people in Australia requires a comprehensive and sensitive approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness of these issues and their deep-rooted historical contexts. Establishing community-based support systems and rehabilitation programs that cater to the specific needs of individuals struggling with alcohol addiction, including culturally sensitive approaches for Indigenous populations. In addition to this, implementing educational campaigns and programs aimed at raising awareness about the risks and consequences of alcohol abuse, targeting both youth and adults. These efforts should encompass culturally relevant messaging and engage with local communities. Introducing regulations on alcohol sales, marketing, and accessibility to mitigate the impact of alcohol-related harm. This may include restrictions on advertising in Indigenous communities and addressing the availability of cheap, high-alcohol content beverages.

- ▶ Effects of alcoholism

Tackling the underlying social, economic, and environmental determinants of alcoholism, such as poverty, trauma, unemployment, and lack of access to healthcare. This involves holistic approaches that encompass mental health support, economic empowerment, and community development initiatives. Supporting Indigenous cultural revitalisation efforts as a means of promoting resilience and identity, which can contribute to alcohol abuse prevention and recovery. This includes acknowledging the role of cultural connections in healing and well-being.

- ▶ Historical genocide of indigenous people

Acknowledging the historical injustices, including genocide, perpetrated against Indigenous people in Australia through truth-telling processes and official recognition. This involves confronting uncomfortable truths about past atrocities and their ongoing impacts. Supporting efforts to restore indigenous rights to land, culture, and self-governance. This includes addressing land dispossession, supporting land rights movements, and facilitating treaty negotiations where appropriate. Recognising and addressing the intergenerational trauma stemming from the historical genocide, which continues to affect indigenous communities today. This may involve funding for culturally appropriate mental health services and healing programs.

- ▶ Preservation of culture and languages

Supporting initiatives aimed at preserving and revitalising indigenous languages, cultures, and traditions, which were severely impacted by colonial policies. Cultural continuity



is essential for the well-being and resilience of indigenous communities.

- ▶ Significance of addressing cultural issues like alcoholism and genocide.

Overall, addressing social and cultural issues like alcoholism and genocide in Australia requires a commitment to justice, equity, and respect for the rights and dignity of all individuals and communities, particularly those who have been historically marginalised and oppressed. It also involves active participation and collaboration among governments, Indigenous leaders, community organisations, and civil society to create meaningful and lasting change.

Summarised Overview

A more varied and multicultural colonial society, where the British, French, and indigenous people coexisted and interacted in various ways, gave rise to Canadian literature. Early Canadian writers aimed to convey their own unique voice and personality while also drawing inspiration from European literary traditions, particularly those of the British and French. Subsequently, regionalism, bilingualism, immigration, and postcolonialism were among the subjects explored in Canada's increasingly inventive and varied literature. The oral and written traditions of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples—who have a rich and varied culture of storytelling and poetry—are also included in Canadian literature.

The harsh and remote penal colony where the indigenous people were mainly driven out and marginalised by the European immigrants gave rise to Australian literature. The early Australian writers emphasised portraying the outback's hardships and the Australian terrain in a realistic manner. Subsequently, postmodernism, nationalism, multiculturalism, and urbanisation were among the subjects explored in Australia's increasingly experimental and varied writing. The oral and written traditions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who have a rich and ancient culture of storytelling and song-poetry, are also included into Australian literature.

The literatures of the former British colonies and territories are collectively referred to as Commonwealth literature, to which contributions have been made by both Australian and Canadian writers. Literary works from the Commonwealth are distinguished by their hybridity, diversity, and defiance of the prevailing Western literary canon. Moreover, Commonwealth literature affirms the importance and legitimacy of the local and the peripheral while challenging the concepts of centre and periphery.

Assignments

1. In what ways does multiculturalism contribute the Canadian mosaic, and how is this diversity portrayed?
2. How does Canadian literature respond to the changing landscapes of urbanisation and environmental concerns, and what insights does it provide into Canadian society and culture?
3. What are the key elements that define Canadian identity in literature, and how do they differ between English and French- Canadian perspectives?
4. In what ways are the struggles and experiences of immigrants in a multicultural society explored in Canadian literature and narratives?
5. How has the idea of the “melting pot” and the multicultural nature of the nation been portrayed in Australian literature?
6. What insights into the past and efforts at reconciliation of the country may be gained from the portrayal of the Stolen Generation in Australian literature?
7. How does Canadian literature tackle the complicated themes of multiculturalism, embracing diversity and addressing questions of identity and integration at the same time?
8. In what ways do Canadian writers use their examination of immigration experiences to address themes of identity, belonging, and displacement?

Suggested Reading

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9. Woodcock, G. *The World of Canadian Writing*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Unit 2

Immigration, Diaspora, and Indigenous Histories in Canada and Australia

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ gain an understanding of the concept of immigration in Canadian and Australian literature
- ▶ identify and analyse major themes discussed in immigration studies within Canadian and Australian literature
- ▶ recognise and appreciate the contributions of prominent Canadian and Australian writers who address immigration themes
- ▶ gain insights into the themes of settlement, diaspora, transnationalism, multiculturalism, the melting pot metaphor etc.

Background

The history of Canada predates European colonisation, with Indigenous people inhabiting the land for thousands of years. These diverse Indigenous cultures had rich oral traditions and storytelling practices, contributing to the world's literary heritage. In the 15th and 16th centuries, European explorers began to explore and colonise parts of present-day Canada. The establishment of colonies, such as New France, and British North America, brought European languages, cultures, and literary traditions to the region.

Canadian literature began to emerge in the 18th and 19th centuries, often reflecting the experiences of early settlers, explorers, and Indigenous people. Writers such as Susanna Moodie, and Catherine Parr Traill wrote about their experiences in the Canadian wilderness, contributing to the world's understanding of frontier life. In 1867, Canada achieved Confederation, uniting several provinces into the Dominion of Canada. This period marked the beginning of a distinct Canadian identity, reflected in literature that explored Canadian landscapes, history, and cultural diversity.

Australia saw a great deal of change between 1886 and 1904, including the stark contrast between the cultures of the bush and the city, the attitudes of the two main cities, Sydney, and Melbourne, and the ability of Australians to discriminate. There

are times when the distinctions between Australia's two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, best capture the essence of the country. The original settlement, Sydney, was surpassed in the 19th century by Melbourne, which rose to prominence as the country's financial and trade centre. Sydney has restored its dominance in the 20th century, though, and Melbourne writers who consider themselves intellectuals often take offence at this, pitting Sydney's hedonists and stylists against Sydney's. Although there have been numerous poetry schools in Melbourne, the most illustrious was the one that operated at Melbourne University from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Furthermore, Australia is a multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural country that was once a British Empire outpost and a colony for prisoners. The epithet "great melting pot of world cultures" was originally applied to America, but it is currently becoming more appropriate due to the vast number of migrants, especially Asians, who have settled there. Due to the fact that each of these groups of New Australians brought with them their own set of traditions, eating habits, mythologies, and beliefs, they all experienced some difficulty acclimating to the new continent. Some exquisite and powerful work has been produced as a result of this tension between the new and the old, which aims to communicate and maybe even resolve the mental turmoil.

Keywords

Immigration, Settlement, Diaspora, Transnationalism, Multiculturalism, Melting pot, Aboriginals, First natives

Discussion

1.2.1 Immigration

The concept of immigration in Canadian and Australian literature is a theme that explores the diverse and complex realities of migration in these two countries, which have been shaped by immigration and colonisation. Canadian and Australian writers often reflect on the histories and identities of their countries, which are composed of multiple cultures, ethnicities, and races, and the interactions and conflicts between them. They also examine the experiences and perspectives of migrants and their descendants, who have contributed to the development and transformation of these societies but have also faced challenges and barriers.

- Concept of immigration



- ▶ Themes discussed in immigration studies

Some of the themes that immigration studies in Canadian and Australian literature address are: the legacy of colonialism and its effects on settlers and indigenous people, the multiculturalism and policies of these nations, and their implications for social cohesion and integration, the significance of language and literature in expressing and preserving these nations' cultural diversity and heritage, the ways in which minorities and migrants are represented in the media and public sphere, the ways in which minorities and migrants maintain transnational networks and connections with other diaspora communities and their countries of origin, and the opportunities and challenges that migration and diversity in these nations will continue to pose in the future.

1.2.1.1 Some examples of Canadian and Australian writers who address the theme of immigration are:

- ▶ Margaret Atwood: a Canadian writer who is known for her novels, poetry and essays that explore the Canadian identity, culture and history. She often contrasts the Canadian experience with the American one, and questions the notion of a unified national identity.
- ▶ Thomas King: a Canadian writer of Cherokee and Greek descent, who writes about the experiences and perspectives of Native Americans and First Nations people in Canada and the United States. He uses humour, satire and storytelling to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices that surround indigenous cultures, and to assert their rights and dignity.
- ▶ Peter Carey: an Australian writer who is known for his historical and contemporary novels that explore the Australian identity, culture and history. He often portrays the Australian society as a hybrid of different influences, and exposes the conflicts and contradictions that arise from them. One of his most famous novels is *Oscar and Lucinda*.
- ▶ Kim Scott: an Australian writer of Aboriginal and English ancestry, who writes about the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal people

in Australia. He uses language, storytelling and imagination to reclaim and revitalise the indigenous culture, and to challenge the colonial legacy and its impact on the present. One of his most acclaimed works is *That Deadman Dance*.

1.2.2 Settlement

The concept of settlement in Canadian and Australian literature is a theme that explores the historical, social, and cultural aspects of the colonisation and immigration processes that shaped these two countries. Settlement literature often reflects the experiences and perspectives of the settlers and the immigrants, as well as their interactions and conflicts with the indigenous people and the environment. Settlement literature also examines the issues of identity, belonging, adaptation, and representation that arise from the diversity and complexity of these societies.

- ▶ The concept of settlement

1.2.2.1 Some examples of Canadian and Australian writers who address the theme of settlement are:

- ▶ Susanna Moodie: a Canadian writer who wrote about her life as an immigrant in Upper Canada in the 19th century. She also wrote poems, short stories, and novels that explore the themes of settlement, culture, and identity.
- ▶ David Malouf: an Australian writer who writes about the history and culture of Australia, especially the colonial and postcolonial periods. He also writes poetry, essays, and short stories that reflect his interest in language, memory and imagination.

1.2.3 Diaspora

The idea of diaspora in Canadian and Australian literature is a theme that explores the diverse and complex realities of migration in these two countries, which have been shaped by immigration and colonisation. Diaspora literature often reflects the experiences and perspectives of the migrants and their descendants, as well as their interactions and conflicts with the indigenous people and the environment. Diaspora literature also examines the issues of identity, belonging,

- ▶ Concept of diaspora



adaptation and representation that arise from the diversity and complexity of these societies.

1.2.3.1 Some of the features that define diasporic literature are:

- ▶ A history of dispersal: diasporic literature traces the movements and displacements of people across borders and continents, often as a result of violence, oppression, or economic hardship. Diasporic literature also explores the effects of dispersal on the individual and collective identities of the migrants and their descendants.
- ▶ Myths and memories of the homeland: diasporic literature evokes nostalgia and longing for the original or ancestral homeland, as well as the myths and stories that preserve and transmit the cultural heritage and traditions of the diasporic communities. Diasporic literature also interrogates the idealisation and distortion of the homeland, as well as the possibility and impossibility of return.
- ▶ A sense of alienation and marginalisation: diasporic literature expresses the feelings of estrangement and exclusion that many migrants and minorities face in the host societies, where they are often discriminated, stereotyped, or silenced. Diasporic literature also challenges the dominant narratives and representations of mainstream culture, and asserts the rights and dignity of diasporic subjects.
- ▶ A desire for belonging and recognition: diasporic literature explores the search for a sense of belonging and recognition in new or multiple places of residence, as well as the formation and transformation of diasporic identities and communities. Diasporic literature also examines the tensions and negotiations between assimilation and difference and between loyalty and resistance.
- ▶ A hybrid and dynamic culture: diasporic literature celebrates the hybridity and diversity of the diasporic cultures, which are influenced by various

sources and contexts, and are constantly changing and evolving. Diasporic literature also showcases the creativity and innovation of diasporic expressions and practices, such as language, literature, music, art, and religion.

- ▶ A transnational and global orientation: diasporic literature reflects the transnational and global connections and networks that the diasporic communities maintain with their countries of origin and other diaspora groups, as well as their involvement and participation in global issues and movements. Diasporic literature also critiques the global systems and structures that shape and affect diasporic conditions and experiences, such as colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and globalisation.

1.2.3.2 Some famous Canadian writers who address diaspora themes are:

- ▶ Rawi Hage: a Lebanese-born Canadian writer who is known for his novels that explore the experiences and perspectives of immigrants, refugees, and exiles in Canada and abroad.
- ▶ Kim Thúy: a Vietnamese-born Canadian writer who writes about her life as a refugee and an immigrant in Canada.
- ▶ Thea Lim: a Singaporean-born Canadian writer who writes about the themes of migration, identity, race, and time.
- ▶ Ayelet Tsabari: an Israeli-born Canadian writer who writes about the experiences and perspectives of Mizrahi Jews (Jews of Arab lands) in Israel and Canada.
- ▶ Michael Ondaatje: a Sri Lankan-born Canadian writer who writes about the history and culture of Sri Lanka, Canada and other countries.

1.2.4 Transnationalism

The concept of transnationalism in Canadian and Australian literature is a theme that explores the diverse and complex realities of migration in these two countries, which have been shaped by immigration, and colonisation. Transnationalism

- ▶ The Concept of transnationalism

refers to the cross-border activities and practices that migrants and their descendants engage in, as well as the transnational connections and networks that they maintain with their countries of origin and other diaspora groups. Some examples of Canadian, and Australian writers who address the theme of transnationalism are: Rawi Hage, Kim Thúy, Thea Lim, David Malouf, Peter Carey, Kim Scott and so on.

1.2.5 Multiculturalism

- ▶ The concept of multiculturalism

Multiculturalism in Canadian and Australian literature is a theme that explores the diverse and complex realities of migration in these two countries, which have been shaped by immigration and colonisation. Multicultural literature often reflects the experiences and perspectives of the migrants and their descendants, as well as their interactions and conflicts with the indigenous people and the environment. Multicultural literature also examines the issues of identity, belonging, adaptation, and representation that arise from the diversity, and complexity of these societies. This has been explained in detail in the previous unit. Some examples of Canadian and Australian writers who address the theme of multiculturalism are: Margaret Atwood, Thomas King, Peter Carey, Kim Scott and so on.

1.2.6 Melting Pot

- ▶ Definition of the term melting pot

The term “melting pot” is a metaphor for a society where different cultures, ethnicities, and races blend together into a common culture. It is often used to describe the cultural integration of immigrants into the United States, but it can also be applied to other countries that have experienced immigration and colonisation, such as Canada and Australia.

- ▶ Melting pot as a metaphor

In Canadian and Australian literature, the melting pot metaphor is often challenged or criticised by writers who explore the diversity and complexity of their societies, and the issues of identity, belonging, and representation that arise from them. Some writers celebrate the multicultural nature of their countries, while others expose the conflicts and inequalities that exist between different groups, especially the indigenous people and the settlers.

1.2.7 Migration Studies

Migration studies is a research field that examines the causes, processes, and consequences of human mobility across borders and within countries. It covers various aspects

- ▶ The concept of migration studies

of migration, such as the motivations and experiences of migrants, the policies and practices of states and other actors, the impacts and challenges of migration on societies and cultures, and the responses and adaptations of migrants and host communities. Migration studies is an interdisciplinary field that draws on insights from different disciplines, such as sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, law, economics, history, and others.

- ▶ Major themes discussed under migration studies

In Canadian and Australian literature, migration studies is a theme that explores the diverse and complex realities of migration in these two countries, which have been shaped by immigration and colonisation. Canadian and Australian writers often reflect on the histories and identities of their countries, which are composed of multiple cultures, ethnicities and races, and the interactions and conflicts between them. They also examine the experiences and perspectives of migrants and their descendants, who have contributed to the development and transformation of these societies but have also faced challenges and barriers. Some of the topics that migration studies in Canadian and Australian literature address are: the colonial legacy and its impact on the indigenous people and the settlers, the multicultural nature and policies of these countries and their implications for social cohesion and integration, the role of language and literature in expressing and preserving the cultural diversity and heritage of these countries, the representation and recognition of migrants and minorities in the media and the public sphere, the issues of racism, discrimination and xenophobia that affect migrants and minorities, the transnational connections and networks that migrants maintain with their countries of origin and other diaspora communities, and the future prospects and challenges of migration and diversity in these countries. Some of the famous Canadian writers are Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Laurence, Douglas Coupland, Carol Shields, Leonard Cohen and so on.

- ▶ Definition of First Native

1.2.8 First Natives

The term “first natives” refers to the Indigenous people of Canada and Australia, who were the original inhabitants of these lands before the arrival of European colonisers. Indigenous people in Canada, and Australia are culturally diverse, and each group has its own literature, language, and culture.

Indigenous literature in Canada and Australia is a broad

- ▶ First Natives of Canada and Australia

- ▶ The use of the term “Indigenous literature” in Canadian Literature

- ▶ The idea of Indigenous literature in Australian literature

- ▶ Introducing the term Aboriginal

- ▶ The concept of Aboriginal literature

and rich field that encompasses various forms and genres, such as oral tradition, storytelling, poetry, fiction, non-fiction, drama, and film. Indigenous literature often reflects the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous people, as well as their interactions and conflicts with the colonisers, the environment, and other cultures. Indigenous literature also examines the issues of identity, belonging, adaptation, and representation that arise from the diversity and complexity of these societies.

In Canadian literature, the term “Indigenous literature” refers to the fiction, plays, poems, essays, and other works authored by the Indigenous people of Canada. Each group has its own literature, language, and culture. The first creative writer of Indigenous descent to break into mainstream European literary circles was E. Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake (1861–1913). Her father, George Johnson, was a Mohawk chief.

In Australian literature, David Unaipon (1872–1967) is recognised as the first Aboriginal author to be published. Indigenous Australian literature includes fiction, plays, poems, essays, and other works authored by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia. A letter written by Bennelong to Governor Arthur Phillip in 1796 is the first known work written in English by an Aboriginal person.

1.2.9 Aboriginals

Aboriginal is a term that refers to the Indigenous people of Canada and Australia, who were the original inhabitants of these lands before the arrival of European colonisers. Aboriginal people in Canada, and Australia are culturally diverse, and each group has its own literature, language, and culture.

Aboriginal literature in Canada, and Australia is a broad and rich field that encompasses various forms and genres, such as oral tradition, storytelling, poetry, fiction, non-fiction, drama, and film. Aboriginal literature often reflects the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal people, as well as their interactions and conflicts with the colonisers, the environment, and other cultures.

The term Aboriginal or Indigenous in Canadian literature designates the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people who are the original occupants of Canada. Works by these communities in both English, and French, as well as in their native tongues,

- ▶ Defining the term Aboriginal, or Indigenous in Canadian literature

- ▶ Defining the term Aboriginal, or Indigenous in Australian literature

- ▶ Introducing the phrase life in the reserves

- ▶ Features of the life in the reserves

- ▶ Major aspects of life in the reserves

can be found in indigenous Canadian literature. It includes works of fiction, dramas, poetry, and essays, among other genres. Rita Joe, Eden Robinson, Thomas King, Lee Maracle, Richard Wagamese, Joseph Boyden, Michael Kusugak, and Waawaate Fobister are a few of the well-known Indigenous writers from Canada.

Whereas the term Aboriginal in Australian literature refers to the Indigenous people of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Writings by these organisations include plays, essays, poems, fiction, and other forms of Australian indigenous literature. Although the earliest documented work written in English by an Aboriginal person is a letter from Bennelong to Governor Arthur Phillip in 1796, David Unaipon was the first Aboriginal author to be published, in 1925–1926. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the quantity of published and well-known Indigenous writers.

1.2.10 Life in the Reserves in Canada

The phrase life in the reserves describes the circumstances and experiences of the First Nations people who live on territory that the Canadian government has set aside for them. The Indian Act, which has drawn criticism for its colonial and paternalistic aspects, governs how reserves are run. Reserves make up a very small portion of the ancestral lands that Indigenous peoples had prior to European colonisation.

Life in the reserves in Canada is often marked by poverty, inequality, and social problems. Many reserves lack adequate infrastructure, such as housing, water, electricity, internet, and roads. Many reserves also face health, education, and employment challenges, such as high rates of infant mortality, morbidity, suicide, substance abuse, crime, and unemployment. Many reserves also struggle with the preservation and revitalisation of their culture, language, and identity, as well as the protection of their rights and land.

But hardship and hopelessness are not the main aspects of life in the reserves of Canada. In addition, many reserves have thriving, resilient communities where members assist one another while upholding their beliefs, traditions, and values. Leaders and activists on many reserves also work to better the living conditions and general well-being of their people by promoting their goals and interests. The range and depth of Canadian literature and culture are enhanced by the artists and writers who inhabit many reserves and share their ideas



and creativity.

1.2.11 French and English Sides of Canada

The French and English sides of Canada in Canadian literature are a theme that explores the historical, cultural, and linguistic aspects of the two major divisions of Canadian society: the English-speaking and the French-speaking. The literature of Canada reflects the country's dual origin and its official bilingualism, as well as the interactions and conflicts between the two groups.

- ▶ What are the French and English sides of Canada?

- ▶ The role of language and literature in Canada's cultural diversity and heritage

The role of language and literature in expressing and preserving Canada's cultural diversity and heritage, the representation and recognition of the English and French communities in the media and public sphere, the issues of nationalism, separatism, and federalism that affect the country's political and constitutional status, and the opportunities and challenges of bilingualism and biculturalism in the future are just a few of the themes that the French and English sides of Canada address in Canadian literature. The French and English sides of Canada is a topic that several Canadian authors have tackled, including Margaret Atwood, Gabrielle Roy, Hugh MacLennan, Michel Tremblay, and others.

1.2.12 The Stolen Generations in Australia

The stolen generations in Australia are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities by the Australian government and church missions between 1905 and 1970. The government policy was based on the assumption that the Aboriginal people were dying out and that the mixed-race children could be assimilated into white society. The children were placed in institutions, missions, foster homes or adopted by white families, where they often faced abuse, neglect, and discrimination. The removals caused profound trauma and suffering for the children and their families, and resulted in the loss of their culture, language, and identity. The stolen generations are considered a major human rights violation and a form of genocide.

- ▶ The concept of Stolen Generation in Australia

- ▶ Impact of Stolen Generation policy on the lives of people

Australian literature reflects the impact and legacy of this policy on the lives and identities of the survivors and their descendants, as well as their interactions and conflicts with



- ▶ Major themes addressed in Australian literature

- ▶ Introduction to the theme of dispossession of land, language, and culture

the colonisers, the environment, and other cultures.

Some of the themes addressed in Australian literature are: the trauma and suffering caused by the separation and displacement of the children and their families, the abuse, neglect, and discrimination that many children faced in the institutions, missions, foster homes or adoptive families where they were placed, the loss and recovery of their culture, language, and identity, the search and reunion with their relatives and communities, the healing and reconciliation process, and the recognition and apology by the government and society. Some examples of Australian writers who address the theme of stolen generations are: Doris Pilkington Garimara, Kim Scott, Archie Roach, and others.

1.2.13 Dispossession of Land, Languages and Culture

In both Canadian and Australian literature, the theme of dispossession of land, languages, and culture is prevalent, reflecting the historical experiences of Indigenous people in these countries.

1.2.13.1 Dispossession of Land

- ▶ In Canadian literature, dispossession is often depicted through the loss of Indigenous lands due to treaties, agreements, and infrastructure development. This dispossession is tied to settler colonialism and the expansion of European settlers.
- ▶ In Australian literature, dispossession of land is a recurring theme, reflecting the historical experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The loss of land is often linked to colonial practices and policies.

1.2.13.2 Dispossession of Languages

In Canadian literature, the loss of Indigenous languages is a significant issue. The literature of Canada is often divided into French and English, reflecting the country's dual origin and official bilingualism. However, this overlooks the numerous Indigenous languages that have been marginalised or lost.

In Australian literature, the loss of Indigenous languages is also a major concern. Before British colonisation, over 250 languages and 800 dialects were spoken in Australia. Today,

only 123 Indigenous languages are spoken, and all are under threat.

1.2.13.3 Dispossession of Culture

- ▶ In Canadian literature, the cultural dispossession of Indigenous people is often explored. This includes the loss of traditional practices, knowledge, and ways of life due to colonial policies and practices.
- ▶ In Australian literature, cultural dispossession is a significant theme. It reflects the impact of colonial policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, including the loss of traditional practices and knowledge.

These themes are explored in various forms of literature, including novels, poetry, and non-fiction, providing a nuanced understanding of the experiences of Indigenous people in Canada and Australia. It is important to note that these experiences can vary greatly between different communities and individuals.

Australian and Canadian literature reflects the impact and legacy of this process on the lives and identities of the Indigenous people and their descendants, as well as their interactions and conflicts with the colonisers, the environment, and other cultures.

Some of the themes discussed as a part of dispossession of land, languages, and culture in Australian and Canadian literature are: the trauma and suffering caused by the invasion and displacement of the Indigenous people from their ancestral lands; the abuse, neglect, and discrimination that many Indigenous people faced in the reserves, missions, schools or institutions where they were placed; the loss and recovery of their culture, language, and identity; the search and reunion with their relatives and communities; the healing and reconciliation process; and the recognition and apology by the government and society.

Some examples of Australian and Canadian writers who address the theme of dispossession of land, languages, and culture are: Doris Pilkington Garimara, Kim Scott, Archie Roach, Thomas King, Gabrielle Roy, Hugh MacLennan, Michel Tremblay, and others.

▶ Exploration of themes via various forms of literature

▶ Impact of the process of dispossession

▶ Major themes discussed as part of dispossession

▶ Examples of writers dealing with the theme

Summarised Overview

Though they have evolved differently over time, colonisation has influenced both Canadian and Australian literature. The richness and diversity of their individual cultures, as well as their attempts to find recognition and identity in a globalised world, are all reflected in these literary works.

The harsh and remote penal colony where the indigenous people were mainly driven out and marginalised by the European immigrants gave rise to Australian literature. The early Australian writers emphasised portraying the outback's hardships and the Australian terrain in a realistic manner. Subsequently, postmodernism, nationalism, multiculturalism, and urbanisation were among the subjects explored in Australia's increasingly experimental and varied writing. The oral and written traditions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who have a rich and ancient culture of storytelling and song poetry, are also included in Australian literature.

A more varied and multicultural colonial society, where the British, French, and indigenous people coexisted and interacted in various ways, gave rise to Canadian literature. Early Canadian writers aimed to convey their own unique voice and personality while also drawing inspiration from European literary traditions, particularly those of the British and French. Subsequently, regionalism, bilingualism, immigration, and postcolonialism were among the subjects explored in Canada's increasingly inventive and varied literature. The oral and written traditions of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people—who have a rich and varied culture of storytelling and poetry—are also included in Canadian literature.

Assignments

1. In what ways are the struggles and experiences of immigrants in a multicultural society explored in Canadian literature and narratives? Explore.
2. Explain how the idea of the “melting pot” and the multicultural nature of the nation have been portrayed in Australian literature.
3. What insights into the past and efforts at reconciliation of the country may be gained from the portrayal of the Stolen Generation in Australian literature? Explain in detail.
4. Analyse how Canadian literature tackles the complicated themes of multiculturalism, embracing diversity, and addressing questions of identity and integration at the same time.
5. Elucidate in detail the ways Canadian writers use their examination of immigration experiences to address themes of identity, belonging, and displacement.



Suggested Reading

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2. Kortenaar, Neil Ten. "Multiculturalism and Globalization." *Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*. Ed. Coral Ann Howells and Eva Marie Kroeller. Cambridge UP, 2003. 556-79.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Poetry

BLOCK-02

Block Content

Unit 1 Canadian Poetry

“Song of the Great Spirit”- First Nations Blackfoot

“Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never be Written”- Margaret Atwood

Unit 2 Australian Poetry

“Australia”- A. D. Hope

“The Year of the Foxes”- David Malouf

Unit 1

Canadian Poetry

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ analyse Blackfoot spiritual beliefs and values in the “Song of Great Spirit” and how they challenge colonial narratives.
- ▶ examine Atwood’s poetic techniques in “Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written” and their connection to themes.
- ▶ compare and contrast worldviews on nature, wisdom, and growth in the two poems.
- ▶ interpret how the poems explore language, expression, and representing human suffering.

Background

The two powerful poems “Song of the Great Spirit” and “Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never be Written” offer meaningful insights into the diversity of voices shaping Canada’s literary identity. The Great Spirit Prayer of the Blackfoot First Nations expresses a profound connection to the natural world and timeless spiritual values. Its reverence for ancestral wisdom reflects oral traditions that are the deep roots of Indigenous Canadian literature. Works by Thomas King and Louise Halfe echo such themes. In contrast, Margaret Atwood’s avant-garde confrontation of global suffering embodies cosmopolitan influences. Her sparse free verse, grappling with the failures of language and imagination to convey trauma, exemplifies the innovative experimentation of Canadian modernist poetry. Atwood’s ethical commitment to bearing witness against injustice aligns with pioneering Canadian writers like Earle Birney and Irving Layton who challenged society’s moral hypocrisy. Despite their divergent styles and concerns, the Great Spirit Prayer and Atwood’s poem thoughtfully uphold poetry’s power to give voice to diverse human experiences - from metaphysical rituals on the land to political persecution overseas. These voices intertwine to create a complex Canadian literary identity, both nurtured by Indigenous roots and open to global horizons. The poems poignantly capture the paradoxes of reality that compel our shared search for wisdom, empathy and moral courage.



Keywords

Indigenous, Reverence, Spirituality, Trauma, Oppression, Resistance, Expression

2.1.1 Poem 1: “Song of the Great Spirit”- First Nations Blackfoot

The Blackfoot Confederacy is a celebrated alliance of closely connected First Nations bands that have ancient roots across the grasslands of western Canada and the northern United States. First Nations refers to the original native peoples of Canada. The Blackfoot traditionally travelled and lived across a large homeland stretching from the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan down into the U.S. states of Montana and Wyoming. This was an expansive prairie region of flat grassy plains with few trees. For hundreds of years, different Blackfoot bands were united through shared culture, language, and way of life. They worked together as the Blackfoot Confederacy and moved around this sweeping prairie landscape, which sustained their livelihood for generations. Thus, the Blackfoot Confederacy represents the long-established union of First Nations bands deeply rooted in the prairie lands of North America. At the heart of Blackfoot culture was a profound, interdependent relationship with the buffalo. These nomadic people followed the massive buffalo herds that migrated across the prairies. The buffalo provided their main source of food, clothing, shelter, and tools - sustaining every need. The Blackfoot crafted transportable ‘tipis (tents) from buffalo hides and utilised every part of the buffalo’s body. The meat was dried into pemmican, the bones became tools and arrowheads, the sinews served as bowstrings and threads, the horns were shaped into spoons and cups, and the tails turned into fly brushes. This symbiotic connection shaped their entire way of life.

► Nomadic buffalo culture

► Spiritual reverence for buffalo

Spiritually, the Blackfoot revered the buffalo as a sacred gift from the Creator, their divine supernatural force. According to legend, the cultural hero and trickster figure Napi received a visit from the Creator. Napi was instructed to teach the people how to communicate with the buffalo nation and hunt sustainably, honouring their sacrifice. The Blackfoot expressed gratitude through ceremonies, songs, and oral stories that reflected the spiritual links between the people,

the buffalo, and the land that nourished them all. This unique celebration of the buffalo bonded physical survival needs with mystical beliefs. This cultural heritage was passed down through generations.



Fig. 2.1.1 First Nations People of Canada

In Blackfoot society, men gained prestige through bravery in warfare and hunting. Male warriors who exhibited courage against foes earned the privilege of wearing special feathers or headdresses like war bonnets, symbolizing their valour. Women demonstrated value through skills like tanning hides, sewing elaborately decorated clothes and moccasins, and perfecting artful beadwork and quillwork. Quillwork designs featured geometric patterns and symbols depicting personal visions. Women also carried out the laborious work of moving camp and processing meat.

► Gender roles, bravery, artistry

Elders maintained cultural knowledge and identity by recounting legends, teaching language, and using ceremonial rites of passage to prepare youth to assume community roles. Many traditional stories featured supernatural beings like the trickster Napi and conveyed moral lessons. The Sun Dance ritual marked a boy's passage into manhood. Girls' puberty rituals celebrated their power to create life.

► Elders and rituals

This long-established way of life was profoundly disrupted when European and American fur traders arrived, beginning in the 1700s-1800s. To profit from buffalo pelts and tongues, these traders massacred the buffalo to near extinction, slaughtering over 40 million by 1883. Without the buffalo, the Blackfoot's self-sufficient nomadic existence could not continue.

► Colonial disruption



Fig. 2.1.2 Flag of the Blackfoot Confederacy

► Forced assimilation

During this painful period, the Blackfoot were confined to reservations on treaty lands and were forced to abandon their traditional lifestyle. On reservations, government programs sought to assimilate Indigenous children by forbidding Native languages and cultural ways, inflicting trauma. Many Blackfoot converted to Christianity under this pressure.

► Cultural resilience

Yet, despite unimaginable challenges, the Blackfoot people maintained their cultural spirit and identity. Elders kept ancestral wisdom alive through oral history and memory. Traditional dances, songs, and ceremonies endured, now blending old practices with new meanings. For example, the Sun Dance ritual incorporated Christian components while still honouring ancient roots. The Horn Society protected ceremonial knowledge.

► Revitalization and continuity

Today, around 16,000 Blackfoot Confederacy members reside on reserves in Alberta and Montana. Efforts to revitalize culture teach youth the language and worldviews of their ancestors. By studying old ways like using tipis and hunting with bows and arrows, they integrate the past with the present. The Blackfoot instil continuity and pride. Their timeless values of community, environmental reciprocity, and gratitude carry forward. Through resilience, adaptation, and determination, the Blackfoot culture lives on.

Many Canadian writers have included the Blackfoot people and culture in their books and stories. This helps teach people about the Blackfoot way of life. Some key examples are:

- Duncan Campbell Scott was a Canadian government worker in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

He worked with First Nations groups. Scott was also a poet. He wrote poems about the Blackfoot people and their traditions.

▶ Literary representations

- ▶ Pauline Johnson was a Canadian writer and performer in the late 1800s and early 1900s. She was Mohawk and English. Johnson wrote a novel titled *The Moccasin Maker*. One story in it is about a Blackfoot woman.
- ▶ Rudy Wiebe is a Canadian novelist. He wrote about First Nations people in novels like “*The Temptations of Big Bear*.” This book has Blackfoot characters. Wiebe wanted to share Indigenous stories through his writings.
- ▶ Métis writer Maria Campbell wrote a memoir called “*Halfbreed*.” It is about her life growing up near Blackfoot lands. Campbell shares Blackfoot history and folklore she learned from her grandmother.
- ▶ Louise Halfe is a Cree-Blackfoot poet. She published collections of poems like *Blue Marrow* and *Burning in this Midnight Dream*. Her poems draw from Blackfoot’s language, beliefs, and experiences.
- ▶ David Carpenter wrote mystery novels featuring a Blackfoot character named Rowdy. His books explore Blackfoot culture and history.
- ▶ Eden Robinson is a Haisla and Heiltsuk novelist. Her book *Son of a Trickster* incorporates Blackfoot mythology.
- ▶ Tomson Highway is a Cree playwright. His play *The Rez Sisters* references the Blackfoot Sundance.

▶ Spiritual Invocation

2.1.1.1 Summary of the Song

“The Great Spirit Prayer” is a profoundly moving and insightful poem that offers a window into the spiritual beliefs, values, and worldview of the Blackfoot First Nations people. Composed in 1887 by Chief Yellow Lark of the Lakota Sioux,



this prayer powerfully invokes the Great Spirit, asking for guidance, strength, wisdom, compassion, calm, and courage.



Fig.2.1.3 Chief Yellow Lark of the Lakota

► Structured

Structurally, the prayer follows a clear pattern, with each stanza requesting the Great Spirit to bestow a particular gift or virtue. The opening stanza is an invocation, calling upon the Great Spirit and acknowledging its sacred power as the source of all life. The repetition of “hear me” underscores the direct and intimate connection being forged between the speaker and the divine spirit.

► Strength & Wisdom

The second stanza seeks strength and wisdom from the Great Spirit. This request for fortitude of body, mind and character recognizes that we often face difficulties in life that require both inner power and enlightenment to overcome. The reference to the Great Spirit’s own strength and wisdom further roots this petition in the belief that the Great Spirit embodies these qualities.

► Harmony with nature

In the third stanza, the speaker longs for beauty, awe and reverence for the natural world, as conveyed through the vivid image of the sunset’s red and purple hues. This aesthetic sensibility and appreciation for nature reflect the Blackfoot First Nations’ close relationship with the land and animals, which they venerated. The desire to “walk in beauty” affirms

their conviction that living in harmony with nature is integral to human well-being and spiritual fulfilment.

► Interconnectedness

The fourth stanza continues this reverence for the natural world by asking for respect for all things created by the Great Spirit, and openness to learn the inherent lessons within each rock and leaf. This belief in the Great Spirit as the creator and an embodiment of divine teachings in nature demonstrates the Blackfoot First Nations perspective of the sacred interconnectedness of all living beings and elements.

► Ancestral wisdom

In the fifth stanza, the speaker seeks wisdom to understand the teachings passed down by his ancestral community. This acknowledgement of cultural heritage and collective wisdom aligns with the emphasis the Indigenous peoples place upon preserving and learning from the knowledge encoded in their traditions. It reflects a holistic worldview wherein spiritual insight is accumulated over generations.

► Self-mastery quest

The sixth stanza articulates the desire for calm, strength and self-knowledge. By seeking to conquer the “greatest enemy” - oneself - it promotes the virtue of self-mastery and inner growth. It emphasizes overcoming egoism and base impulses through discipline and introspection. This battle for self-improvement requires tranquillity as well as courage.

► Balanced compassion

The seventh stanza continues this emphasis on moral development by asking for compassion without becoming overwhelmed by empathy. This speaks of the belief that while compassion for others is noble, one must retain equilibrium and discernment when faced with immense suffering in the world. It reflects the wisdom that moral virtue is attained by finding a balance between selflessness and wisdom.

► Departure

Finally, the eighth stanza requests that the Great Spirit help the speaker maintain purity, integrity and virtue throughout life’s journey so that he may pass from this world without shame or regret when the time comes. The metaphor of sunset evokes the sense of life’s transitory nature. The longing to meet one’s death with dignity and grace stems from the belief that how one lives shapes the soul’s destiny after death.

2.1.1.2 Themes of the Poem

Connection to Nature

The prayer emphasizes living in harmony with nature. Phrases like “walk in beauty,” “make my eyes ever hold the



► Harmony with nature

► For a meaningful life

► Journey to Self-Improvement

► Transcending Mortality

► Symbolic sunset

red and purple sunset,” and “help me find compassion without empathy overwhelming me” convey a desire for balance within the natural world. Nature is revered as a teacher, with “lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.” The Blackfoot see spiritual wisdom encoded in nature. Sunset, rocks, and leaves are mentioned, showing reverence for all aspects of nature. Nature is sacred, not just monuments.

Seeking Wisdom

A recurring theme is entreating to the Great Spirit for wisdom, understanding, and guidance for living a meaningful life: “I need your strength and wisdom”, “make me wise”, and “let me learn.” Wisdom is sought to interpret lessons embedded in creation and tradition: “Help me understand the things you have taught my people.” Spiritual knowledge takes precedence over material gain.

Personal Growth

The prayer focuses on self-improvement by overcoming “my greatest enemy: myself.” It emphasizes taming ego and baser impulses. Virtues like strength, calmness, compassion, courage, and integrity are requested from the Great Spirit - “help me remain calm and strong.” The passage depicts life as a journey of moral and spiritual development.

Mortality

The sunset metaphor evokes the transitory nature of life. This theme recognizes human impermanence and finitude. Yet the prayer voices hope for life after death, to “come to you [the Great Spirit] without shame” in the afterlife. Mortality is accepted but not feared. Death is a transition, not an end.

2.1.1.3 Motifs

Light/Dark

The “red and purple sunset” and its fading light symbolize mortality. Life’s ephemeral nature is captured in the retreating sunset. The desire to “walk in beauty” connects light with virtue and tranquillity. Light represents grace. Darkness is associated with shame and wickedness: “without shame” implies that darkness is shameful.

Nature

Sunsets, leaves, rocks and wind depict nature as sacred and

▶ Divine Nature

▶ Animating wind

▶ Influential devices

▶ Structural harmony

instructive. Nature nurtures and teaches. Nature is a binding force connecting humanity and the Great Spirit. Nature's beauty reflects divine creation.

Wind

Wind represents the presence of the invisible Great Spirit, "whose voice I hear in the winds." The breath imagery of wind connotes the life force flowing through nature. Wind signifies the animating power of the Great Spirit.

2.1.1.4 Poetic Devices

Repetition

"Hear me!" is repeated, emphasizing the desire for connection and revelation. The refrain "make me" underscores the plea for the Great Spirit's gifts and guidance.

Metaphor

The fading sunset is employed as a metaphor for life's transitory nature. Walking in beauty represents living virtuously, and sunlight is a metaphor for grace. The wind is used as a metaphor for the invisible spirit.

Imagery

The vivid imagery of the sunset hues, the whispering winds, leaves and rocks convey Native American reverence for nature. Nature images reinforce the Great Spirit's immanence in creation.

2.1.1.5 Structure

Linear Progression

The prayer follows a clear linear sequence, with each stanza building upon the previous one. It progresses thematically from invocation to seeking wisdom, strength, virtue, and eventually preparation for death.

Parallelism

The parallel grammatical structure of the stanzas creates a consistent poetic rhythm. Lines like "Help me find compassion" and "Help me remain calm" demonstrate syntactic parallelism

2.1.1.6 Analysis

The "Great Spirit Prayer" provides a window into the

► Cultural contrast

distinctive worldview and values of the Blackfoot Nation. This differs in important ways from the mainstream Canadian vision of life which stemmed out of the country's colonial history. In its reverence for the natural landscape, emphasis on ancestral wisdom, and belief in nature as imbued with spiritual meaning, the prayer conveys a metaphysical orientation and ethos that was often denigrated or suppressed under the cultural hegemony of Euro-Canadian settler colonialism.

► Cultural resistance

Politically, the prayer operates as a subtle yet profound challenge to dominant Canadian narratives that rendered Indigenous voices and perspectives as inferior appendages to the Anglo-Canadian cultural core. The solemn, eloquent petition to the Great Spirit seeks strength, wisdom, tranquillity, and moral virtue – ideals that counter racist stereotypes of First Nations as intellectually simple and culturally crude. Its themes of living harmoniously with nature, treading lightly on the land, attaining self-knowledge, and seeking ancestral guidance uphold values often marginalized by Canada's capitalist, industrial, and individualistic trajectory following European conquest. The prayer functions as a dissenting voice that disrupts this colonial hegemony by affirming Indigenous cultural sophistication, ecological awareness, and commitment to community and tradition.

► Literary continuity

Literarily, the “Great Spirit Prayer” represents the continuing resonance of oral traditions and ontological themes that shape contemporary Indigenous Canadian literature. The prayer exemplifies formats of Indigenous orature – formal petitions, reverential invocations, cyclic rather than linear structures – that endured despite colonial bans on First Nations cultural rites and rituals. Its style reflects oral modes adapted creatively to modern contexts, underpinning new genres like poetry and novels that draw deeply from Indigenous storytelling roots while branching into innovative literary forms. Thematically, its emphasis on questing for knowledge, living virtuously, recognizing human impermanence, and seeking harmony with nature pervades later Indigenous Canadian literature. Thomas King, Louise Halfe, and Richard Wagamese echo such themes in their works, aligned with the prayer's premise that wisdom and ethics are indispensable to understanding one's place within the cyclical web of existence. The prayer provides a vivid embodiment of Indigenous perspectives and oral continuities that are fundamental to – yet often unacknowledged by – the Eurocentric Canadian literary canon. Engaging with the Great Spirit Prayer and its themes

enriches understanding of the diversity and indigeneity at the heart of Canadian literature.

2.1.2 Poem 2: “Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never be Written” - Margaret Atwood’

2.1.2.1 Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is one of the most influential and celebrated poets of contemporary English literature. Born in Ottawa, Canada, in 1939, Atwood began writing poetry in her youth. She published her first poetry collection, *Double Persephone*, in 1961 and soon garnered critical acclaim for her evocative and vivid poetic voice. Her poetry explores themes of feminism, ecology, Canadian national identity, and gothic subjects like death and violence. She often employs irony, mythological allusions, and shifting narrative perspectives in her work. Some of her best-known poetry collections include *The Circle Game* (1964), *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), *True Stories* (1981), and *Morning in the Burned House* (1995).

► Influential poet



Fig. 2.1.4 Margaret Atwood

The Circle Game, her second book of poetry, cemented Atwood’s reputation. The collection examines the circularity of life and cycles of love and loss. Poems like “This is a Photograph of Me” also revealed her talent for using concise, imagistic language to probe philosophical questions about time, mortality and human connections. In *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Atwood adapted the voice of a 19th-

► Poetic evolution

► Multi-genre mastery

► Ever-relevant poet

► Confronting injustice

century Canadian pioneer woman to reflect on colonisation, displacement of indigenous peoples, and the dangers of brutal wilderness environments. This innovative long poem highlights Atwood's interest in recasting and questioning dominant historical narratives. Atwood's more recent books showcase her mastery of traditional poetic forms like the sonnet and villanelle. *Morning in the Burned House* explores themes of ageing and death with vivid imagery of nature's cycles. The stark but beautiful lyricism of poems like "Dancing" exemplify Atwood's later style, which pairs fatalistic themes with a compressed, haiku-like precision.

Beyond poetry, Atwood has excelled in multiple genres. She is best known for the dystopian fiction *The Handmaid's Tale*, but she has also written acclaimed short fiction, nonfiction, television scripts, librettos, children's books and literary criticism. Her eclectic body of work is united by recurring themes that sympathetically examine women's lives, power imbalances in society, environmental issues and the paradoxes of human nature.

Now in her 80s, Margaret Atwood continues to publish new poetry that proves she still has her finger on the pulse of contemporary culture. Her latest collection, *Dearly*, touches on topics like climate change, technology and social media. Yet her vivid language and insightful observations on love, loss and the human condition remain as stirring as ever.

2.1.2.2 About the Poem

Margaret Atwood's haunting poem grapples with the challenge of articulating human suffering through art. Written as an act of solidarity with persecuted poets and activists worldwide, "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written" confronts atrocities that seem unimaginable yet persist. Atwood argues that no poem can adequately represent certain traumatic experiences like torture and starvation. However, she maintains that the effort must continue, particularly when bearing witness could mean death for poets under authoritarian regimes. Atwood implies that those able to write freely have a duty to give voice to the silenced. Formally, the poem has six numbered sections in loose free verse. While acknowledging the limitations of language, the stanzas offer vivid snapshots of oppression through details like "the sandpits/where so many were buried." Ultimately, Atwood's poem is a meditation on poetry's role in responding to human brutality. It grapples with the anguish of clear-

sighted confrontation with cruelty. Atwood argues that poets must not flinch or turn away from hard truths if their words are to expose injustice and affirm human dignity.

2.1.2.3 Summary of the Poem

Stanza I

This is the place
you would rather not know about,
this is the place that will in habit you,
this is the place you cannot imagine,
this is the place that will finally defeat you
where the word why shrivels and empites
itself. This is famine.

► Unimaginable suffering

The first stanza introduces the main theme of the poem - the existence of immense suffering that seems unimaginable yet is all too real. Atwood speaks of “the place you cannot imagine” where the question “why” loses meaning because there are no rational explanations for such atrocities. She refers to an unspecified place of “famine” to conjure associations of mass starvation and deprivation. The stanza sets an ominous, haunting tone for the rest of the poem.

Stanza II

There is no poem you can write
about it, the sandpits
where so many were buried
& unearthed, the unendurable
pain still traced on their skins.

This did not happen last year
or forty years ago but last week.
This has been happening,
this happens.

We make wreaths of adjectives for them,
we count them like beads,
we turn them into statistics & litanies
and into poems like this one.

Nothing works.
They remain what they are.



► Limits of artistic representation

Atwood asserts that there can be no poem adequately capturing or responding to the horrors she alludes to, even though poets attempt to do so through devices like vivid imagery (“wreaths of adjectives”). The suffering is not some distant historical event but something recent and ongoing. All artistic efforts to represent it through poems and statistics fail - “Nothing works.” The victims remain trapped in their cruel reality. Atwood suggests the limitations of art and language when confronted with such extreme human suffering.

Stanza III

The woman lies on the wet cement floor
under the unending light,
needle marks on her arms put there
to kill the brain
and wonders why she is dying.

She is dying because she said.
She is dying for the sake of the word.
It is her body, silent
and fingerless, writing this poem.

The focus shifts to a specific victim, an addicted woman dying in captivity. Her arms bear marks from injections given to destroy her mind and selfhood. She is dying “because she said” - being punished for speaking out or resisting her captors. Even in death, her voice emerges through her “silent” body “writing this poem.” Atwood implies this woman could represent the many who are persecuted for truth-telling and defiance under oppressive regimes.

Stanza IV

It resembles an operation
but it is not one

nor despite the spread legs, grunts
& blood, is it a birth.

Partly it’s a job
partly it’s a display of skill
like a concerto.

It can be done badly

► Silenced resistance

► Dehumanizing cruelty

or well, they tell themselves.
Partly it's an art.

The victim endures a dehumanising ordeal that superficially resembles an operation or birth but is actually an act of torture and violation. Her torturers view it as a clinical “job” requiring skill, or even an artistic “concerto,” rather than acknowledging the woman’s humanity. Atwood condemns such moral dissociation, showing how oppressors rationalise atrocities through euphemisms and willful blindness.

Stanza V

The facts of this world seen clearly
are seen through tears;
why tell me then
there is something wrong with my eyes?

To see clearly and without flinching,
without turning away,
this is agony, the eyes taped open
two inches from the sun.

What is it you see then?
Is it a bad dream, a hallucination?
Is it a vision?
What is it you hear?

The razor across the eyeball
is a detail from an old film.
It is also a truth.
Witness is what you must bear.

This stanza counteracts the claims that reports of suffering are exaggerated or misperceived. Atwood argues that clear-eyed witnessing of the world’s cruelty brings only anguish, like having one’s eyes forced open towards the sun. Nevertheless, she maintains that refusing to “flinch” or turn away, no matter how painful, represents the only moral response. The metaphors of the razor and the sun amplify the idea that unfiltered confrontation with human brutality wounds the psyche.

► Witnessing



Stanza VI

In this country you can say what you like
because no one will listen to you anyway,
it's safe enough, in this country you can try to write
the poem that can never be written,
the poem that invents
nothing and excuses nothing,
because you invent and excuse yourself each day.

Elsewhere, this poem is not invention.
Elsewhere, this poem takes courage.
Elsewhere, this poem must be written
because the poets are already dead.

Elsewhere, this poem must be written
as if you are already dead,
as if nothing more can be done
or said to save you.

Elsewhere you must write this poem
because there is nothing more to do.

In the final stanza, Atwood contrasts the safety of those able to express themselves freely in democratic countries with the courage required of poets under authoritarian regimes where speaking truth leads to death. She implies that those not directly oppressed should use their freedom to give voice to the persecuted. Atwood concludes that in dangerous contexts, poets have no choice but to write, despite the likelihood of being silenced. Their words bear witness and defiance in the face of mortal risk.

Through its six stanzas, Atwood's poem grapples with the dilemma of art in the face of suffering. While words may always fall short in capturing traumatic human experiences, Atwood argues that the poet has to continue attempting to write "the poem that can never be written" - to raise empathetic awareness about victims silenced by oppression and violence.

► The poet's duty

► Artistic imperative

2.1.2.4 Themes

Bearing Witness and Giving Voice

A core theme is the duty to bear witness and give voice to suffering, even if artistic expression will always be inadequate.

► Writing as resistance

► The paradox of poetry

► Courageous truth-telling

► Chilling indifference

► Violent symbols

► Symbolic bodies

Atwood admires poets who take courage to write “where the poets are already dead,” implying the moral obligation to memorialize the silenced and defy oppressors. She suggests writing as an act of solidarity and resistance even in the face of mortality.

The Limits of Language

Atwood repeatedly states “nothing works” to capture others’ pain in poetry. She emphasizes the inability of “wreaths of adjectives” and elegies to convey the full magnitude of trauma. However, this highlights poetry’s paradoxical power - it can expose the constraints of language and imagination by grappling with the unspeakable.

Defiance and Resistance

Atwood shows how bearing witness requires defiant truth-telling despite risks. The woman tortured for saying “no” represents courageous resistance to dehumanization. Atwood implies poetry too can challenge complacency by forcing readers to confront injustice without “flinching.”

Dehumanization and Cruelty

Details like “the sandpits/where so many were buried” highlight inhuman suffering. The torturers’ clinical indifference underscores how regimes justify brutality through euphemisms and denial of victims’ humanity. Atwood conjures a chilling picture of the depths of human cruelty.

2.1.2.5 Motifs

Violent Imagery

The “razor across the eyeball” symbolizes how unfiltered confrontation with suffering wounds us. Similarly, the sun simile evokes the agony of refusing to turn away from cruelty. These violent motifs emphasize the horrors Atwood compels us to see.

Bodies

Bodies especially the addicted woman’s “silent” corpse become vessels for poetic expression, since the dead cannot speak. The “spread legs” highlight dehumanizing exploitation. Atwood focuses on bodies to stress lives unjustly lost or damaged.



Geography

The ominous “elsewhere” denotes dangerous places where bearing witness demands courage. By contrast, “this country” represents societies where one can freely express, but may tend towards apathy. The locations underline moral obligations depending on one’s context.

▶ Contrasting spaces

2.1.2.6 Analysis of the Poem

Atwood’s sparse free verse and fragmented structure reflect the great difficulty of articulating traumatic experiences in poetic form. The six numbered sections create a sense of disjunction, preventing any smooth narrative flow between the stanzas. This structure mimics the way words fail to fully capture suffering. The gaps between sections are like missing pieces of understanding that prevent the “poem that can never be written” from becoming whole.

▶ Fragmented expression

Within each numbered section, Atwood relies on concise, blunt statements paired with vivid imagery to evoke the horror of events like famine and torture. When describing the unfathomable suffering, she uses spare lines like “This is famine.” This simplicity acknowledges the inadequacy of elegant poetic language for conveying atrocities. However, details like “the sandpits/where so many were buried” provide tangible anchors for comprehending the scale of death, even if imagination cannot grasp the full extent.

▶ Simplicity

Atwood’s use of an intimate second-person voice also attempts to overcome the distance between the reader and the victim. When she writes “this is the place that will finally defeat you,” she directly addresses our presumed inability to conceive of such misery. The jarring shock value of lines like “the razor across the eyeball”, further shakes the reader out of comfortable complacency about others’ pain.

▶ Intimate address

Ultimately, Atwood argues that even failed attempts at capturing traumatic experiences have value. By demonstrating the constraints of language and imagination, the “notes towards a poem” reveal the urgent need to find better ways of understanding and expressing human suffering. The fragmentary nature of Atwood’s verses highlights all that remains unarticulated. The poem insists on the necessity of continuing to write about unspeakable events, despite the anguish.

▶ Value in failure

Atwood maintains that those fortunate enough to live under regimes where they can speak freely have a moral duty to

- Confronting collective responsibility

keep “eyes taped open” in the face of injustice worldwide. As readers, we become the eyewitnesses bearing responsibility for not averting our gaze. The jarring violence of Atwood’s imagery forces us to confront realities that wound our psyches, refusing to let us turn away. Through its gaps and emotional intensity, the poem compels recognition of oppressed voices that demand to be heard. Even flawed attempts to give expression to suffering serve to prick the collective conscience. Atwood suggests that poetry may be unable to fully capture trauma, but it can shine a light into the shadows to affirm our shared humanity.

Summarised Overview

“Song of the Great Spirit” provides insight into the spiritual beliefs and close ties to nature within Blackfoot culture. The ‘prayer’ emphasizes living harmoniously with the natural world, seeking wisdom, and personal growth. It conveys the Blackfoot reverence for all aspects of nature as sacred gifts. However, Blackfoot culture was profoundly disrupted by the arrival of European fur traders and settlers. Despite damage to their way of life, Blackfoot traditions have endured through oral history and cultural revitalisation.

Margaret Atwood’s poem “Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written” grapples with articulating human suffering through art. Atwood argues that though words always fall short of capturing trauma, poets must continue to bear witness. She admires those courageous enough to write despite the danger. While acknowledging the limitations of language, her vivid imagery compels readers to confront oppression. The fragmented structure reflects the difficulty of expressing unspeakable events. Ultimately, Atwood suggests poetry can affirm humanity by refusing to turn away from cruelty.

Assignments

1. How does the Great Spirit Prayer represent and challenge Blackfoot and Canadian colonial culture?
2. Analyse how Atwood’s poetic devices enrich the themes in “Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written.”
3. Compare the worldviews expressed in the Great Spirit Prayer and Atwood’s “Notes Towards a Poem.”
4. How do the two poems explore language, expression and human suffering?
5. Discuss Atwood’s depictions of bodies in “Notes Towards a Poem.”



6. Analyse Atwood's contrasting geography in "Notes Towards a Poem."
7. Discuss the literary significance of the Great Spirit Prayer and Atwood's "Notes Towards a Poem" within poetry traditions.

Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ analyse the themes and literary techniques used by A.D. Hope and David Malouf in their poems.
- ▶ understand the historical and cultural context of mid-20th century Australia that influenced these poets.
- ▶ examine how the poems reflect Australia's search for national identity and the paradoxes of its landscape.
- ▶ appreciate the contributions of Hope and Malouf to the development of Australian literature.

Background

The two seminal poems “Australia” and “The Year of the Foxes” by celebrated Australian poets A.D. Hope and David Malouf, respectively, offer compelling examinations of Australian cultural identity in the mid-20th century. Both were written at a pivotal moment as the nation sought to establish its unique voice following World War II and the loosening of colonial ties. Emerging from the immense sacrifices of the war years, Australians looked inward to reflect on their society and landscape to forge a mature national consciousness.

Hope and Malouf capture this search for meaning as the possibilities and anxieties of the post-war world stirred the Australian imagination. While Hope satirizes parochialism in “Australia”, he recognizes the harsh beauty of the interior's potential to inspire visionary art. Malouf's sensuous snapshot of suburban life in “The Year of the Foxes”, confronts the unsettling undercurrents of trauma, materialism and loss of innocence. Despite their vastly different styles, both poets display an ambivalent patriotism that affectionately chides Australia to better fulfil its creative promise. Their poetry sensitively traces fault lines in the national psyche between urban and outback, civilization and wilderness, culture and nature. Hope and Malouf compellingly give literary voice to Australia's coming of age, distilling eternal challenges of identity, belonging and moral responsibility to the land. These resonant works illuminate how the paradoxes of Australia's ancient contours shape an ongoing journey of national self-understanding.

Keywords

Ambivalence, Identity, Landscape, Nationalism, Postwar, Satire, Suburbia

Discussion

2.2.1 Poem 1: “Australia”- A. D. Hope

2.2.1.1. A.D. Hope

► Poet and academic

The Australian poet A.D. Hope was born in 1907 in Cooma, New South Wales. After completing his education, Hope lectured in English literature at the University of Queensland for several years before moving to Canberra in 1939 to join the faculty at the Canberra University College, which later became the Australian National University.

► Ironic insight

Hope’s poetry is known for its ironic wit, technical brilliance, and insightful commentary on Australian culture and landscapes. He published his first volume of poetry, *The Wandering Islands*, in 1955 at the age of 48. The collection demonstrates Hope’s precise control of rhythm and diction, along with his signature sardonic perspective on Australian suburban life. As one critic wrote, Hope’s poems “catch at the heart of the country itself, reflecting its heat, its dryness, its loneliness.”

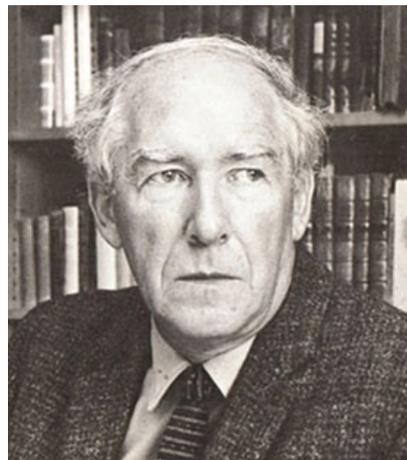


Fig. 2.2.1 A.D. Hope

▶ Satirical versatility

Several of Hope's best-known poems come from his 1961 collection, *Native Companions*. These poems exhibit his capacity for moving from humorous satire to profound tragedy within the space of a few lines. In the much-anthologized poem 'Australia', Hope presents a mockery of stereotypical Australian language and imagery before concluding with a sudden, serious plea for national cultural maturity. Other poems, like 'The Death of the Bird' and 'Imperial Adam', contain powerful and unsettling images of human isolation within the vast Australian wilderness.

▶ Erudite critic

Hope's erudite, intelligent voice earned him recognition as one of the leading poets of "The Sydney School" of Australian writers. He became one of the most highly regarded literary critics writing for publications like *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *Quadrant*. From 1951 to 1966, he was a literature editor for *The Observer* in London, giving him an influential voice internationally.

▶ Australian essence

While A.D. Hope achieved fame for his ironic, clever English verse forms, he sought to capture the authentic Australian experience. He once wrote, "Whatever we are, or may become, we owe to this country beneath our feet." Hope compellingly evokes the Australian landscape as a harsh yet beautiful muse capable of inspiring vibrant art and literature. Though he passed away in Canberra in 2000, Hope's depictions of mid-20th century Australia continue to resonate with readers across the world.

▶ National satire

2.2.1.2 About the Poem "Australia"

A.D. Hope's poem "Australia" was originally written in 1939, first published in 1943 and has frequently been anthologized. The poem exemplifies Hope's signature wit and satirical voice as he critiques Australian cultural values and stereotypes. Written in the post-World War II era, 'Australia' responds to a national search for identity and maturity, at a critical point in the country's establishment of itself on the world stage.

▶ Cultural critique

The poem's clever mimicry of ocker Australian slang serves to ridicule parochial, anti-intellectual tendencies in Australian culture. Hope argues that for Australia to gain respect abroad, it must move beyond insular bush mythology and develop greater cultural sophistication. The abrupt volta, or turn, at the end of the poem makes a passionate plea for Australian literature and art to embrace universal human values rather

than superficial, localised themes.

“Australia” remains one of Hope’s most famous works for its piercing cultural analysis. By satirising narrow “Bush” genre tropes, Hope calls upon Australians to tell more meaningful stories of their lives through a literary idiom of wisdom and compassion. The poem captures a significant shift in national attitudes during the 1960s as Australia emerged from its colonial ties and affirmed its unique values on the world stage.

► Cultural evolution

2.2.1.3 Summary of the Poem

In the opening stanza, Hope establishes a bleak image of the Australian landscape as a weary nation of dull, grey trees that cloak the hills in drab camouflage, like a modern army uniform. The trees seem to swallow the land, their paws stretched like a worn-down Sphinx or an eroded stone lion. This paints a quiet, haunting picture of the natural world, aged and faltering.

► Desolate landscape

In the second stanza Hope argues that despite Australia’s reputation as a young country, it is actually “the last of lands, the emptiest.” He unflatteringly compares Australia to a woman past middle age, beyond her childbearing years. While her breast remains tender, “within the womb is dry,” evoking a sense of the country’s cultural infertility and failure to bear new life. The vivid maternal metaphor presents Australia as aged and barren compared to other vibrant civilisations.

► Maternal metaphor

Expanding on this portrayal of Australia’s lack of cultural richness, the third stanza declares that it is “without songs, architecture, history”, suggesting that the country is devoid of - the passions, monuments, and stories that breathe life into younger nations. Hope depicts Australia’s rivers pathetically dissipating into the harsh inland, drowned by enveloping desert sands. This is linked to the country’s own “immense stupidity” which floods and stunts its monotonous tribes scattered across the continent from Cairns to Perth.

► Cultural vacuum

In the fourth stanza, Hope conjures the outback’s leathery survivors who stoically endure rather than fully live. Meanwhile, Australia’s five cities are cast as parasitic sores that bleed the country dry of resources. Populated by transplanted Europeans clinging timidly to the edges of an alien land, these cities further Australia’s sterility.

► Struggle for survival

The fifth stanza takes a more hopeful turn as Hope suggests some people gladly abandon the “lush jungle” of modern



▶ Spiritual retreat

▶ Creative potential

▶ Uncertainty

▶ Cultural immaturity

▶ Harsh beauty

civilisation to find solace in the austere beauty of Australia's desert interior landscape and spiritual barrenness. He expresses a wish for visionary prophets to emerge from the wilderness, uncorrupted by the sterile chatter of the wider world.

Stanza six continues this proposition that from the untamed red centre, creative spirits may spring forth and evade the doubt and empty discourse of modern life. Hidden in the ancient emptiness, lies a fertile creative power.

Finally, the seventh stanza concludes that away from the civilised "green hills," a fierce poetry defiantly arises from the savage wasteland. Though flawed, Australia yet harbours an originality in its desert seeds that contrast with the coddled landscapes abroad. In lyrical verse rich with metaphor, Hope offers ambivalent insight into Australia's origins. While admonishing its cultural limitations, his vivid language ultimately cherishes the possibilities of the country's primal interior to inspire a vibrant poetic spirit unique to this land.

2.2.1.4 Themes of the Poem

Australian Cultural Immaturity

A major theme within "Australia" is Hope's critique of Australia's lack of cultural and intellectual maturity. He laments the country's deficiency in "songs, architecture, history" and describes Australia as culturally infertile. Hope uses the unflattering metaphor of Australia as "a woman beyond her change of life" with a dry womb, emphasizing its failure to bear artistic achievements and heritage compared to older civilizations. He scathingly refers to "the river of her immense stupidity" flooding the dull population. The poem urges Australia to progress beyond insular bush mythology and develop greater cultural sophistication.

Physical Landscape

Hope connects Australia's perceived cultural infertility with its harsh natural landscape. The "endless outstretched paws" of trees darkening the hills reflect stifled creative life. The rivers fading among desert sands mirror the country's monotonous citizens stunted by their environment. Hope uses evocative language to capture the heat, dryness, and loneliness of the terrain. However, while the landscape reflects cultural barrenness, Hope also recognizes its savage beauty as a source of defiant creativity.

Satire of Australian Nationalism

The poem mocks the cheap patriotism and nationalism Hope saw thriving in post-war Australian culture. He sarcastically mimics the ocker Australian slang of “the ultimate men” who merely survive in the outback rather than fully live. His exaggerated adoption of this bush voice satirizes the limited horizons and anti-intellectualism of aggressive Aussie nationalism. Hope derides those clinging to insular Australian mythology rather than engaging with universal human values.

▶ Satirical nationalism

Urban Life

While the outback represents cultural sterility, Hope also critiques the parasitism and superficiality of Australia’s urban centres. The “five teeming sores” of cities are cast as parasites draining the nation, populated by transplanted Europeans who fail to embrace the land. Hope portrays the cities as dependent on Europe, lacking authentic Australian culture. He scorns urban society as a pretentious “lush jungle” of modernity. The opposition of desert and city emphasizes their mutual failings.

▶ Urban superficiality

Natural Landscape

Despite Hope’s critiques, he offers redemption through the harsh beauty of the natural landscape. He hopes Australia’s deserts can inspire visionary creativity away from stifling modernity. Like the prophets of ancient lands, artists can find truth in the “Arabian desert” of Australia’s interior. By engaging with the landscape’s primal power, creators can forge a vibrant new culture. The emptiness contains a fierce poetic spirit if grasped.

▶ Aussie interior as the Arabian desert

Tension Between Civilization and Wilderness

This redemption lies in embracing the tension between civilization and wilderness. Hope juxtaposes the desert’s barrenness with the cultured chatter of urban apes to emphasize the sterility of both. Yet, from the clash between landscape and society, the poem hints at a new national poetry emerging. Hope suggests civilization alone breeds hollowness, just as the savage wilderness alone breeds hardness. From the dialogue between the two, a balance may be found.

▶ Civilized wilderness

Patriotism

Ultimately, while harshly admonishing Australia’s flaws, Hope’s tone remains patriotic. His desire for authentic



- ▶ Between criticism and patriotism

Australian literature conveys a frustrated affection. As an intellectual, he criticizes anti-intellectualism, yet romanticizes the landscape. Hope occupies the ambivalent ground between criticism and patriotism. Despite sharp satire, his poem advocates for Australia's cultural advancement, not its denigration. This ambivalence encapsulates Australia's uncertain post-war national identity.

2.2.1.5 Analysis of the Poem

- ▶ Employing techniques

Hope's poem expertly employs language, imagery and metaphor to offer ambivalent commentary on Australian national identity. The opening landscape reflects cultural sterility through military camouflage colours and erosion, like "an ancient Sphinx demolished." However, the conceit of Australia as a post-menopausal woman satirically suggests decay. References to "immense stupidity" flooding the "monotonous tribes" criticize anti-intellectualism, implying Australia must mature.

- ▶ The desert and the city

The poem depicts the failings of both the desert and the city; the wilderness breeds hardness through mere survival, while cities parasitically "drain" resources. Yet the desert offers potential redemption. By escaping the pretensions of urban "civilisation" for the stark "Arabian desert of the human mind," artists find primal inspiration, like ancient prophets.

- ▶ Mocking nationalism

The abrasive Australian dialect in stanza four mocks insular bush mythology. Sardonic mimicry skewers aggressive nationalism and parochialism. Contrasting this with the worldly perspective of "cultured apes" sharpens Hope's rebuke of ocker Australian anti-intellectualism.

- ▶ Scope of Aussie landscapes

However, the final stanza's evocation of "some spirit which escapes" modern sterility suggests Australia's ancient landscapes could nourish vibrant creativity. While unleashing a scathing attack on the stagnant culture, Hope expresses underlying faith in the redemptive potential of the sunburnt country. His ambivalent patriotism affectionately chides Australia to realize its promise better.

- ▶ Lyrical critique

Hope's skilful use of sound, crafts poetic music. The alliteration of "s" sounds suggests the haunting suspiration of the desert; elsewhere, abrupt rhymes like "dry/lie" inject urgency in critiquing Australia's immaturity. The poem's cyclical structure, returning to the landscape, implies roots for renewal exist if Australia engages its environment. For



all its severity, Hope's vivid poem compellingly envisions an Australian literature of wisdom, integrity and humanism rising from the red soil.

2.2.2 Poem 2: "The Year of the Foxes"- David Malouf

2.2.2.1 David Malouf

David Malouf is an acclaimed Australian writer known for his lyrical and evocative prose. Born in Brisbane in 1934 to a Lebanese father and English mother, Malouf has become one of Australia's most distinguished literary figures. Though he has written novels, short stories, poetry, libretti and a play, he is perhaps best known for his sensitive depictions of the Australian experience and landscape.

► Versatile artistry

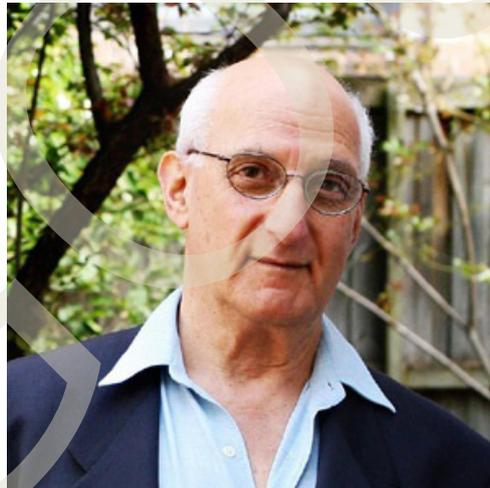


Fig. 2.2.2 David Malouf

Malouf studied at the University of Queensland and spent time teaching in England before returning to Australia in the late 1960s. His first novel, *Johnno* (1975), is a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story set in Brisbane during World War II. Praised for its vivid characters and depiction of friendship, *Johnno* announced Malouf as an exciting new voice in Australian literature. This was followed by the acclaimed novels *An Imaginary Life* (1978), a fictional narrative of the Roman poet Ovid's exile, and *Child's Play* (1982), a subtle and complex family drama.

However, it was with his short fiction that Malouf established himself as one of Australia's pre-eminent writers.

► Literary debut

- ▶ Masterful short stories

- ▶ Cultural crossroads

- ▶ Malouf's contribution

- ▶ Furry memories

- ▶ War impact

His collections include *Antipodes* (1985), which contrasts Australian life with Europe, and *Dream Stuff* (2000), meditations on memory and the passage of time. Recurring themes include Australia's complex relationship with its landscape, the power of memory, and the migrant experience. Malouf writes with precision and grace, conjuring deep human experience through close observation of ordinary lives.

Though based in Sydney, Malouf often returns in his writing to his native Brisbane and its surrounding bush and suburbs. Works such as the novel *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and the short story "The Sun in Winter" sensitively explore Australia's colonial history and complex cultural heritage. Malouf sees Australia as a "meeting place" between Europe and Asia, its identity forged by these rich cross-currents.

Now in his eighties, Malouf continues to produce luminous short fiction and poetry. He was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 2000 and the Australia-Asia Literary Award in 2008. Compassionate, thoughtful and lyrical, Malouf's writing has done much to shape Australia's literary identity. As an acclaimed man of letters, he has made a remarkable contribution to Australian arts and letters over five decades.

2.2.2.2 Summary of the Poem

Stanza 1:

The poem opens with the speaker recalling when they were ten years old. Their mother, having sold her old fox fur coat, decides there is money to be made in the fox fur trade. She brings many fox furs into their home, hanging them on hooks and draping them over furniture. The detailed description of the mother's fox fur coat evokes the life-like qualities of the animal, with its "ginger red bone-jawed" face that seems to play dead with a "cunningly dangled" paw. This hints at the complex relationship between humans and animals that will be explored.

Stanza 2:

Women from Brisbane, negatively characterized as superficial and materialistic, visit the house as potential buyers of the fox furs. They arrive in taxis wearing American GIs on their arms, suggesting the social impact of World War II on Australian society. The women are described as "rather the worse for war", implying unspoken trauma and grief beneath their garish exterior.

▶ Child's dream

Stanza 3:

The child speaker sleeps in a room nearby, where he can hear the cries of the fox furs at night. This haunting image conveys the disturbance the foxes bring into the domestic space. The speaker dreams of the “dangerous spark” of life in the foxes’ eyes, and contrasts it against their current status as lifeless commodities.

▶ Objectified furs

Stanza 4:

The mother’s material possessions, like fine china and glasses, are described. The fox furs are now reduced to showpieces among the mother’s lavish belongings. Their commodification and display represent the troubling relationship between humans and animals.

▶ Description of furs

Stanza 5:

An extended description of the lifeless fox furs ensues. Their rows upon rows with thin noses and pricked ears emphasize their sheer number. The use of the word “dead” bluntly conveys what has happened to them.

▶ Sound of hounds

Stanza 6:

The child speaker imagines the sound of hounds hunting the foxes, but this natural sound is now lost, replaced by the artificial setting of the house. The women try on the limp fox paws like fashion accessories, oblivious to the life they once contained.

▶ Poem's end

Stanza 7:

The women walk outside in high heels, wearing the fox furs like superficial status symbols. The vivid image of the “rusty red” furs like “dried-up wounds” evokes subtle violence. The ladies wear the foxes alongside their GI escorts, suggesting the furs represent war spoils and material excess. The poem ends on a solemn note.

2.2.2.3 Thematic Discussion

The Complex Relationship Between Humans and Animals

A core theme explored in the poem is the complex and often troubling relationship between humans and animals. The fox furs are commodified and stripped of their innate wildness to become decorative showpieces. The detailed description in

- ▶ Human-animal dynamics

Stanza 1 of the mother's fur coat is like a real fox playing dead hints at the living essence the animals once held. This is contrasted with how they are reduced to "row upon row" of dead creatures "thin-nosed, prick-eared" in Stanza 5. The child speaker is haunted by the foxes' cries at night and dreams of their living, dangerous spirit within. Their treatment by the Brisbane ladies who try them on as fashionable accessories further emphasises the distortion of humans' relationship with animals.

Post-War Materialism and Superficiality

Malouf subtly examines the rise of materialism and superficiality in Australian postwar society through the fox fur trade. The women who arrive to buy furs are portrayed as garish, wearing lavish outfits and more concerned with social status. Their GI escorts reference the influx of American culture and excess. That the women are "the worse for war", implies a deeper trauma beneath their pretence and material fixation. The fox furs become representations of excess, described as "spoils", and this seems to reflect the ladies' lack of inner fulfilment or grief.

- ▶ Materialism and trauma

The Loss of Innocence

On a personal level, the child speaker loses innocence witnessing the fox fur trade unfolding in their home. The domestic space, usually a place of sanctuary, is invaded by the foxes and what they represent. The vivid imagination of the child brings the foxes to life in nightmares and dreams, envisioning their untamed nature now gone. The trade also represents the larger encroachment of the outside adult world of business, materialism and war, into the home. The speaker's childhood is pierced by this stark confrontation with mature realities.

- ▶ Lost innocence

War's Encroachment into the Domestic Sphere

The setting reflects the impact of war on suburban domestic life. The fox furs are metaphorically compared to "dried up wounds," suggesting a parallel between the furs and the wounds of war. The image of ladies wearing fur coats alongside their GI escorts further emphasizes the connection between war and materialism. The cries of hunting hounds being "lost behind mirror glass" symbolize the muffling of traditional sounds by the new materialistic lifestyle. Overall, the setting portrays how war has disrupted the traditional suburban domestic life by introducing materialism and militarization.

- ▶ War's domestic impact

► Unsettling imagery

Unease and Disturbance

The poem evokes an unsettling, dreamlike mood through its imagery of the foxes. Words like “lean”, “prick-eared”, “dangerous”, “cornered”, and “rusty red” convey threat and a haunting unease. The foxes lurk ominously in the domestic space where their lifeless presence disturbs the speaker’s sleep and dreams. The atmosphere created is one of underlying trauma and subtle violence as humans exert mastery over animals for material gain. The foxes, both literally and symbolically, fail to be contained, with their presence chilling and lingering.

► Wildness

Nature vs Artifice

The natural world and artificiality of social life are juxtaposed through the image of the fox furs in the human domain. The foxes represent the wildness of nature, described with organic imagery like “bone-jawed”, “ginger red” and “a lean and tufted paw”. But they are removed from their natural habitat to become artificial commodities and status symbols for the Brisbane ladies. Hung up on hooks, trailing from chairs, they are installed like garish decorations into domesticity. The life in their eyes is replaced by a lifeless “spark”, conveying a sense of the animals being violated, and their wild souls made tame.

► Ethical reflections

Morality and Ethics

The poem subtly questions the ethics of animals being treated as commodities for human consumption. The transition of the foxes from living creatures to hollowed-out pelts indicates the lack of moral compass in exploiting animals solely for monetary gain and vanity. That the speaker’s childhood is permeated by the fox trade also indicates the way humanity’s unethical behaviour corrodes innocence. The ladies’ obliviousness to the foxes’ unnatural presence in the home further reveals their moral insensitivity. Through thoughtful subtleties, Malouf prompts larger reflections on humanity’s complex moral relationship with nature.

2.2.2.4 Analysis of the Poem

Malouf’s vivid portrayal of postwar Australian suburban life aligns with the nation’s literary tradition of examining cultural identity. The child speaker’s loss of innocence parallels the broader societal shift in the national psyche following World War II. Malouf subtly explores the increasing influence of

► Cultural shifts

American culture on the ladies accessorizing fox furs with their GI escorts. This captures Australia's complex love-hate relationship with America and the influence of Hollywood glamour.

► Suburban materialism

The superficial Brisbane ladies also represent the rising suburban middle class and materialism taking hold in Australian cities. Their garish excess contrasts the ideal of an egalitarian Australia. Yet, Malouf hints at suburban life's undercurrents through the ladies' unspoken trauma of war. This reflects the lingering scars of trauma embedded within sunny suburban façades, which later Australian writers like Tim Winton would continue to explore.

► Aussie landscape's indifference

The fox fur trade signifies the treatment of animals as commodities heralding modernity's arrival. The severed connection between humans and nature mirrors the environmental themes of Australian literature. The foxes' cries piercing the domestic space echo the harsh Australian landscape's indifference to human attempts to tame it.

► Australian gothic

Malouf's sensuous imagery of physical details is trademarking Australian gothic. The foxes' haunting presence in the family home is reminiscent of iconic works like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Malouf's poetic snapshot distils the complex national identity themes underpinning Australian literature.

► Australia's coming of age

Subtly yet powerfully, "The Year of the Foxes" delineates Australia's coming of age as a nation in the mid-20th century. Malouf confronts the darker undercurrents awakened by the immense sacrifices of war. He reflects a society grappling with its national character amidst rapid social change and an influx of outside influences. Echoing fellow poets like Judith Wright, Malouf's nuanced portrait of a pivotal period in Australia's history resonates through the nation's literary canon.

Summarised Overview

The unit provides an analysis of two key Australian poems - “Australia” by A.D. Hope and “The Year of the Foxes” by David Malouf. “Australia” by A.D. Hope offers a satirical yet patriotic critique of Australian cultural identity in the post-World War II period. Hope mocks aggressive nationalism and parochial bush mythology while recognizing the harsh beauty of the landscape as a source of creative inspiration. He argues that Australia must mature beyond insular attitudes, urging the emergence of an Australian literature of wisdom and humanism.

Malouf’s “The Year of the Foxes” gives a vivid snapshot of Australian suburban life in the 1940s. Seen through a child’s eyes, it subtly explores the social impacts of war, including rising materialism and loss of innocence. The fox fur trade signifies humanity’s troubling relationship with nature and animals. Malouf’s evocative imagery grounds the reader in physical detail, reflecting the Australian gothic literary tradition. Both poems capture a period of national self-examination in mid-20th century Australia. Despite stylistic differences, Hope and Malouf compellingly evoke the Australian landscape and society as sources of identity. The unit provides insightful commentary on the poems’ social context, themes, language and literary significance.

Assignments

1. How does A.D. Hope use satire and irony in “Australia” to critique Australian cultural identity?
2. Discuss the treatment of the Australian landscape in A.D. Hope’s poem “Australia” and how it reflects his views on national culture.
3. Analyze how David Malouf depicts the social impacts of World War II on Australian society in “The Year of the Foxes”.
4. In what ways does David Malouf’s “The Year of the Foxes” align with traditions in Australian gothic literature? Discuss with reference to imagery and themes.
5. How do the poets A.D. Hope and David Malouf engage with ideas of Australian national identity in their respective poems “Australia” and “The Year of the Foxes”?
6. Discuss the use of symbolism in David Malouf’s “The Year of the Foxes” and analyze what the fox furs represent.
7. Compare and contrast the portrayal of the Australian landscape in A.D. Hope’s “Australia” and David Malouf’s “The Year of the Foxes”.
8. How do the themes of A.D. Hope’s poem “Australia” relate to the social and literary context in post-war Australia?



Suggested Reading

1. King, Bruce. "A. D. Hope and Australian Poetry." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 87, no. 1, 1979, pp. 119–41. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27543516>.
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4. Willbanks, Ray, and David Malouf. "A Conversation with David Malouf." *Antipodes*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1990, pp. 13–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41958158>.

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1. Kramer, Leonie Judith Gibson. *A. D. Hope*, Oxford University, 1979.
2. Hope, Alec Derwent. *Directions in Australian Poetry*, Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, 1984.
3. Hope, Alec Derwent. *Selected Poetry and Prose*, Halstead Press, 2000.
4. Le, Nam. *On David Malouf: Writers on Writers*, Schwartz, 2019.
5. Malouf, David. *The year of the foxes and other poems*, G. Braziller, 1979.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Drama and Fiction

BLOCK-03

Block Content

Unit 1 *Komagata Maru Incident* - Sharon Pollock

Unit 2 *No Sugar* - Jack Davis

Unit 3 *Enchantment and Sorrow* - Gabrielle Roy

Unit 4 *Voss* - Patrick White

Unit 1

Komagata Maru Incident

- Sharon Pollock

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse the racist policies and attitudes that led to the Komagata Maru incident
- ▶ examine the play's depiction of the inhumane treatment of the passengers
- ▶ discuss the play's symbolism and how it conveys the trauma inflicted
- ▶ evaluate the play's critique of government hypocrisy and white supremacy

Background

Drama in Canada has its roots in both indigenous and colonial artistic traditions. Indigenous peoples had a rich history of oral storytelling, music, dance and mythology that laid the groundwork for theatrical expression. Early European settlers brought along with them traditions like medieval morality plays and British pantomime, as well as Shakespeare, which took hold during the colonial era.

As a colony of Britain, Canada saw its early theatrical scene dominated by touring productions from England and the United States. It was not until the late 19th century that a distinctive English-language Canadian drama started emerging, often dealing with quintessentially Canadian themes like surviving the wilderness, the clash of indigenous and colonial cultures, and later, post-colonial identity. French-language Quebec theatre also traces a parallel course.

The early 20th century saw more robust infrastructure for Canadian theatre develop through university drama programs, community theatres, and early professional theatre companies. Playwrights and actors started telling distinctly Canadian stories onstage for Canadian audiences hungry to see their experiences reflected. Mid-20th century Canadian playwrights like Herman Voaden, Gratien Gélinas and John Coulter began garnering international attention by bringing local colour to their broadly relatable plays. The turbulent 1960s and 70s saw the rise of more radical, experimental and political theatre made by collectives like Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille and Factory Theatre Lab.



Sharon Pollock was part of this rebellious generation of young playwrights bucking tradition and unafraid to tackle hot-button political issues on stage. As a Western Canadian woman writer, she also brought fresh new voices to a theatre scene traditionally dominated by Eastern men.

By the late 20th century Pollock was established as one of Canada's pre-eminent playwrights. Other contemporaneous writers like Judith Thompson, John Murrell and George F. Walker were also gaining acclaim for their tackling of complex Canadian stories. Collectively, their ethos aligned with artistic movements across the Western world embracing marginalized voices and bringing to light relatable human stories out of political history.

Today's Canadian theatre scene is thriving, diverse and widely celebrated. Descendants of early English and French theatrical traditions now commingle with a multiplicity of cultural influences from various immigrant communities, to create an eclectic tapestry of perspectives onstage. While systemic barriers and funding challenges remain, the past century has seen enormous growth in the range and quality of made-in-Canada drama written, produced and performed for Canadian audiences with reverberations continuing to echo around the world.

Keywords

Komagata Maru, racism, xenophobia, injustice, trauma, dissent, humanisation

Discussion

3.1.1 Sharon Pollock and Canadian Literature

Sharon Pollock is counted among Canada's most widely-read contemporary playwrights. She utilises theatre to spotlight social and political issues in Canadian history.

3.1.1.1 Early Life and Influences

Born in 1936 in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Pollock grew up in the small town of Cochrane, Alberta. The stark beauty as well as harsh realities of the Canadian prairies frequently feature in her plays. Fascinated by theatre from a young

► Canadian playwright

age, Pollock directed amateur productions as a student. She was greatly inspired by the plays of George Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov in taking on large societal issues. Pollock studied theatre for her bachelor's degree in Calgary before attaining her master's in playwriting from the University of Alberta.



Fig. 3.1.1 Sharon Pollock

3.1.1.2 Key Works and Themes

► Documentary theatre pioneer

Pollock first received acclaim in 1973 for her play *Walsh*, dramatising the real impact of the 1960s construction of the Gardiner Dam in Saskatchewan on First Nation Cree communities. This established her key focus on unveiling silenced voices and neglected narratives in Canadian history through what she termed “documentary theatre”.

► Social justice theatre

Her seminal 1976 play *The Komagata Maru Incident* dug into a shameful episode of Canada’s racist immigration policies through the true story of the steamship turned away in 1914 carrying over 300 Sikh, Muslim and Hindu passengers. Pollock highlights state brutality against them despite their legal appeals. The resonant play criticised persisting inequality and civil rights violations in the country. Pollock’s body of work frequently examines unjust power structures, systemic prejudice and the oppressive treatment of minority groups by authorities throughout Canada’s past. She also adapted classic plays like the Greek tragedy *The Trojan Women* to spotlight wartime and refugee suffering.

3.1.1.3 Recognition and Legacy

Honouring her outstanding contributions to Canadian theatre, Pollock has received multiple literary prizes, including

► Documentary theatre legacy

► The incident

the prestigious Governor General's Award. Her body of work and influence in issue-driven documentary theatre has been compared to renowned names like Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht. Several of Pollock's popular plays highlighting forgotten histories and miscarriages of justice continue to be regularly performed, taught and adapted, including *Walsh* and her hard-hitting 1989 drama *Blood Relations*. Through insightful and thought-provoking storytelling, her plays compel audiences to re-examine ingrained assumptions and confront unjust systems historically embedded in the status quo.

3.1.2 The Komagata Maru Incident

In 1914, the Japanese steamship Komagata Maru arrived in Vancouver, British Columbia, carrying over 300 British subjects from Punjab, India. At this time, the Canadian government, led by Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, had implemented stringent regulations to severely limit Indian immigration. These regulations insisted that immigrants make a continuous journey directly from India to Canada on British ships.



Fig. 3.1.2 Immigrants on the Komagata Maru, June 1914.

(Source: Vancouver Public Library)

When the Komagata Maru attempted this long ocean voyage to abide by these regulations, the steamship was met with hostile confrontation upon arrival in Vancouver. Despite court hearings and appeals, the passengers were confined to the Komagata Maru for over two months, denied basic provisions for health and wellbeing, and subjected to hostile

- ▶ Historical confrontation dramatized

surveillance. Eventually, tensions culminated in a violent altercation between passengers and Vancouver police that left many injured and one passenger dead. Sharon Pollock's award-winning play *The Komagata Maru Incident* dramatizes these historical events by focusing on the key figures central to this notable case in Canada's exclusionary immigration history.

3.1.3 The Play *The Komagata Maru Incident*

- ▶ The setting

Pollock sets her play in a 1914 Vancouver brothel by the harbour. The lively brothel setting focuses attention on overlooked people in society. It also highlights the play's challenge of normal social attitudes. A flashy Master of Ceremonies character called T.S. controls the show. The entertaining, circus-like mood masks the troubling events about the Komagata Maru ship.



Fig. 3.1.3 Performance of *The Komagata Maru Incident* directed by Keira Loughran at Stratford Festival, 2017.

► Complex characters

The main character is William Hopkinson, a mixed-race inspector who spies on Vancouver's Sikhs. His British father and Indian Sikh mother reflect Canada's colonial history. Hopkinson feels inwardly conflicted between his duty to stop the Sikhs landing and his hidden cultural bond with them. His tragic failure to unite these two sides of himself leads to his death amid rising violence. Stuck between British and Indian identity, Hopkinson is a victim of Canada's racism. Hopkinson interacts a lot with two prostitutes, Evy and Sophie. Their exchanges reveal Hopkinson's secrets about his heritage and his conflicts over the Komagata Maru case. A Sikh woman and child trapped on the ship, visible in a cage-like enclosure, represent the awful conditions for passengers. Through these characters, Pollock highlights overlooked voices excluded from mainstream histories.

3.1.3.1 Re-Imagining Canada's Mainstream Story

Pollock suggests Canada's national story regularly leaves out unpleasant truths that weaken its positive self-image. Using vivid theatre, her play uncompromisingly faces fixed prejudices at the time and demands a more inclusive vision of Canadian identity. Inviting rethinking of this challenging history, the play shows the past and its myths must be continually re-interpreted to progress towards a fairer nation.

► Historical omissions

3.1.3.2 Relevance of the Play

Through its lively characters and ethical complexity, Pollock's play still provides lessons for today. Its scrutiny of fear-driven racism, barriers to inclusion and ideas of national identity that marginalize unwanted groups still resonate in current debates over immigration and Canadian values. By giving a stirring theatrical voice to those exploiting or fighting injustice around the Komagata Maru incident, this play pushes audiences to re-examine exclusionary attitudes and histories that have blinded Canada to its full reality.

► Relevance and lessons

3.1.4 Setting and Atmosphere

Pollock makes the unusual choice to set her play in a lively 1914 Vancouver brothel. The brothel setting creates a lively circus-like mood throughout the play. The character T.S. is the show's Master of Ceremonies. He controls the action on

► Symbolic characters

► Complex protagonist

► Symbol of immigrant struggle

► Moral guide character

► Master of ceremonies

stage. He also represents the government policies and public opinions that were strongly against the Komagata Maru passengers in real life. The play only shows one Sikh woman from the Komagata Maru ship. She has no name. Her small part symbolizes how nameless and faceless the passengers seemed to Canadian authorities at the time. Through this woman, the play shows the immigrants' difficult situation. But it also shows how officials did not see them as real people.

3.1.5 Characters

William Hopkinson - Hopkinson is the main character. He is the immigration inspector handling the Komagata Maru case. He seems mild-mannered and carries out government orders reluctantly. He suffers inside about his identity. We get glimpses of his turmoil from his words and actions. More on his past Sikh links and personal history could make him a more compelling dramatic character.

The Sikh Woman – She represents the Indian passengers aboard the Komagata Maru. She humanizes their suffering from starvation and mistreatment while awaiting entry to Canada. As a new immigrant hoping to reunite with her brother, she provides the only immigrant view depicted.

Evy - The Chinese-Canadian brothel owner and Hopkinson's mistress. She acts as Hopkinson's moral guide, reminding him of his Asian connections in B.C. Evy criticizes the anti-Asian policies as hypocritical. Though she offers some key ethical insights, we get little on her personality or backstory.

T.S. (The System/The State) - An allegorical First Nations woman playing Master of Ceremonies. Ironically, she sings out government orders to bar the Komagata Maru in song-and-dance. This Trickster-like character satirizes the Canadian government's cruel bureaucratic indifference toward the immigrants.

3.1.6 Themes of the Play

Racism/Xenophobia - A major theme is the racism and anti-Asian prejudice behind Canada's restrictive immigration rules to maintain white control in B.C. Politicians' racist words expose the hypocrisy of barring these British subjects from the empire.

Injustice/Cruelty - The play highlights the inhumane treatment of the Komagata Maru passengers left to suffer



without basics while their fate remains unknown. It depicts an unfair, uncaring government bureaucracy that ignores their humanity.

Colonialism/Empire - As British subjects from India seeking entry into Canada, their plight shows contradictions of how empire's non-white colonized peoples cannot access the same rights in settler colonies favoring white power.

Immigrant Struggles - Through the Sikh woman, the play humanizes struggles immigrants faced when denied entry despite having family in Canada, revealing barriers non-whites faced.

Thus, the major play themes involve anti-Asian racism, strict border control policies, identities and Canada's one-sided nationalist history. By dramatising this forgotten injustice, Pollock exposes Canada's cruel discrimination against non-white immigrants at the time, its colonial past and its self-serving national myths. Quotes highlight clashing views on belonging in Canada, "white man's country" assumptions, and questions about who counts as Canadian.

3.1.7 Analysis of the Play

Sharon Pollock's play *The Komagata Maru Incident* is a powerful reimagination of a neglected historical event that occurred in 1914. The play explores the racial injustice and inhumanity faced by a group of 376 East Indian immigrants who arrived in Vancouver aboard the Komagata Maru, a Japanese ship. The play successfully rewrites this forgotten story, providing a critical perspective on the white masculinist Canada shaped by racist and sexist attitudes.

Pollock draws on the raw material of life to create a new interpretation of the past. She doesn't simply recreate history but adds new meaning to the Komagata Maru incident, reimagining it through the lens of her own experiences and perspectives. The play is structured as a historiographic docudrama, where available facts merge with fiction, creating a new version of Canadian identity and history.

Pollock sets the play in a brothel in Vancouver harbour, with two prostitutes and their lovers as central characters. This unconventional setting provides a "peripheral perspective to the main events" (Cvetković), and the voices of the marginalized women, Evy and Sophie, remind us that society silences those it marks as "other" both within and without.

► Relevant themes

► National identity

► Reimagination of neglected event

► Adds meaning to the incident

► Brothel perspective

The play also features a carnivalesque figure, T.S. (The System), who acts as a Master of Ceremonies, commenting on, explaining, and directing the characters. Pollock uses this imaginative structure, combining serious historical data with the circus, to create an entertaining and thought-provoking experience.

► Identity conflict & racial revelation

The main character, William Hopkinson, an Immigration Department official, undergoes a profound inner conflict. As a representative of the government, he opposes the admission of the Sikhs, but at the same time, he carries a Sikh heritage from his mother, which he repudiates. This divided identity is further explored through his relationship with Evy, who reveals his mixed origins and challenges his racist views.

► Marginalized resistance

Pollock expresses her critical view of white masculinist Canada primarily through her marginalized female characters. Evy and Sophie undermine Hopkinson and the dominant system, providing a moral perspective on the events. The Sikh woman and her child, caged on stage, represent the victimized and discriminated passengers, further highlighting the injustice of the situation. The play reminds us that the construction of Canada is an ongoing process, and past constructions should be re-examined and reinvented. Pollock's reimagining of the Komagata Maru incident adds another important dimension to the event by reconsidering racial and gender issues, challenging the dominant narratives of the time.

► Rewriting history

Thus, in *The Komagata Maru Incident*, Sharon Pollock successfully rewrites a neglected story from history. Through her marginalized characters, she expresses a critical view of the white masculinist Canada shaped by racist and sexist attitudes. The play is a significant contribution to the recreation of the event, uncreating the historical facts and reimagining them in a new, anti-racist light, allowing us to rethink Canadian identity and history.

Summarised Overview

Sharon Pollock's play *The Komagata Maru Incident* is a powerful reimagining of a historical event that occurred in 1914, when a group of 376 East Indian immigrants arrived in Vancouver aboard the Komagata Maru, a Japanese ship. The play explores the racial injustice and inhumane treatment faced by these immigrants, who were denied entry into Canada due to racist immigration policies. Pollock sets the play in a brothel, giving a voice to marginalized characters like the two prostitutes, Evy and Sophie, and the Sikh woman and child who represent the victimized passengers.

The main character, William Hopkinson, an Immigration Department official, undergoes a profound inner conflict as he carries out the government's orders to deny the Sikhs entry, despite his own Sikh heritage from his mother. Pollock expresses a critical view of the white masculinist Canada shaped by racist and sexist attitudes, challenging the dominant narratives and reminding us that the construction of Canada's identity is an ongoing process that should be re-examined and reinvented. The play successfully rewrites this forgotten story, uncreating the historical facts and reimagining them in a new, anti-racist light, allowing us to rethink Canadian identity and history.

Assignments

1. Discuss the significance of Pollock's choice to set the play in a brothel and how it contributes to the play's overall theme and critique of Canadian society.
2. Analyse the character of William Hopkinson and how his inner conflict and divided identity reflect Canada's colonial history and racism.
3. Evaluate the role of marginalized characters like Evy, Sophie, and the Sikh woman in providing a critical perspective on the events and exposing the injustice faced by the Komagata Maru passengers.
4. Examine the play's use of symbolism, such as the caged Sikh woman and the carnivalesque figure of T.S., to convey the trauma inflicted on the passengers and the hypocrisy of the government's actions.
5. Discuss the relevance of Pollock's play in the present day, considering how it resonates with current debates over immigration, national identity, and the treatment of marginalized groups in Canada.

Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse key themes related to colonialism, injustice, resilience and family bonds portrayed in Jack Davis' play *No Sugar*.
- ▶ discuss how the setting, plot and characters in *No Sugar* convey the power dynamics and oppression within the historical assimilation policies depicted.
- ▶ identify and explain stylistic and thematic features characteristic of Australian plays through the example of *No Sugar*.
- ▶ connect lessons from the injustice portrayed in *No Sugar* to ongoing social justice and issues faced by Indigenous peoples today.

Background

Australian plays emerged as a distinct dramatic form portraying the experiences of both Indigenous peoples and later, immigrant settlers in Australia. They give a theatrical voice to Australia's colonial history, cultural diversity, political tensions, and quests to build national identity amid a legacy of displacement.

A dominant feature within Australian drama is the depiction of Indigenous stories and themes long suppressed or appropriated by the dominant Anglo culture. Seminal works like Jack Davis' *No Sugar* prove that Australian theatre can powerfully transmit Aboriginal experiences, from dispossession to ongoing systemic inequalities. These plays challenge mainstream stories. They bring understanding to political issues that still need to be resolved.

Australia has a unique natural environment. In Australian plays, the landscape takes on symbolic meaning. It represents what is gained, exploited or damaged. The desert and bushland hold a mystical fascination, yet they are dangerous for outsiders unfamiliar with them. The extreme conditions of the desert and bush reflect themes of survival, isolation yet interdependence to obtain food and water.

The same characters appear in different Australian plays, dealing with changes in culture against different backdrops. The classic image of the Aussie 'larrikin' displays working-class confidence, distrust of academics and cheeky humour. Their anti-authority attitude shows social divisions between classes. Whether of Indigenous background

facing destructive government policies or later arrivals adjusting to a distant land, Australian plays give voice to those feeling alienated in the country. From generational conflicts to clashes with central power, dramatic works showcase struggles of self-determination against institutions that displace traditional communities.

Through realistic, gothic allegorical or experimental styles matching fragmented internal states, Australian plays convey tensions between outlier perspectives and dominant national myths. Yet for all the cultural collisions shown, signature wit and bold humour balance even the darkest themes regarding the painful underside of the Australian dream.

Keywords

Dispossession, Colonialism, Reconciliation, Landscape, Larrikin, Identity, Alienation

Discussion

3.2.1 Jack Davis

Jack Davis (1917-2000) was an influential Indigenous Australian playwright, poet, activist and author. He was born in Perth but spent part of his childhood on a reservation in Western Australia where he connected with his Aboriginal roots and ancestral language. Later, Davis became an advocate for Aboriginal rights and founded literary organizations to support Indigenous writers and oral traditions.

► Aboriginal writer

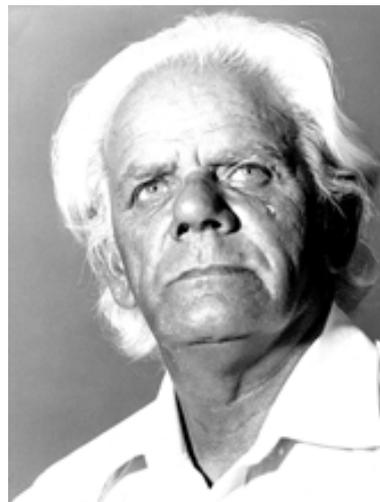


Fig. 3.2.1 Jack Davis

► Prolific playwright

Davis did not publish his first work until age 53, but went on to write over a dozen books including plays, poetry, memoirs and short stories documenting the Aboriginal experience in Australia. His most well-known work is the First-Born trilogy of plays spanning the 20th century. *No Sugar* (1985) is the second play in this series.

► Forced relocation

3.2.2 Introduction to *No Sugar*

No Sugar is a two-act play set in the 1920s and 30s during the Great Depression. It depicts several years in the life of an Aboriginal family, the Millimurras, who are forcibly relocated from their homeland in Northam to a government-run reservation at Moore River.

► Cultural struggle

On this reservation, the Millimurras face racism, human rights abuses, violence and exploitation at the hands of white authorities claiming to “protect” and “civilize” them. The conflict revolves around whether the Millimurras can preserve their dignity and identity against a system trying to eradicate their culture.

► Aboriginal oppression

3.2.3 Summary and Analysis of *No Sugar*

The acclaimed play *No Sugar* by Jack Davis shows the oppression faced by Aboriginal Australians in the 1920s and 30s. It is set in the Western Australian town of Northam and later Moore River Native Settlement. The play shows the racism, exploitation and abuse suffered by the Millimurra family from white authorities.

► Family struggle

Act One introduces the poor but proud Millimurra clan, struggling to survive in a shed in Northam. We meet family matriarch Gran, her tired daughter Milly, good-natured son Jimmy, Milly’s husband Sam and their three kids – bright teenager Joe, little David and clever Cissie. Though poor, the Millimurras maintain their culture through Gran’s stories and live in harmony – until the arrival of the vicious Northam Chief Protector, Mr A.O. Neville.

► Abuse of authority

Mr Neville strides onto the stage full of self-importance and unquestioned authority over Aboriginal lives. Under Australia’s harsh assimilation policies, Neville and Sergeant Carrol have already cut the Millimurra’s food rations despite malnutrition. They insult Aboriginals and plot to force them out of Northam without reason. This sets up Act One’s upsetting climax when Neville orders: “Clear this town, Sergeant. I want these blacks moved.”



► Suffering

Act Two shows the Millimurras dumped at Moore River Native Settlement, designed to isolate Aboriginals. Ironically called a “School for Civilization”, Moore River only teaches suffering under Superintendent Neal and his erratic wife Matron. Matron ignores her husband sexually harassing young Aboriginal women.

► Resistance and tragedy

Against this backdrop of racism, exploitation, and increasing control, some stories of resistance and resilience are shown. Clever Mary avoids Mr. Neal’s advances to have an affair with Joe, leading to her daring midnight escape. But Mary is soon caught - beaten, pregnant, back behind Moore River’s walls to give birth alone. Meanwhile, Joe goes to prison, convicted on Sergeant Carroll’s word alone, devastating his family. Jimmy takes a stand against injustice, interrupting Mr. Neville’s hypocritical Australia Day speech until Jimmy suddenly dies before his stunned family.

► Liberation

The play’s painful final act provides both tragedy and hope. When Mary’s unnamed baby is born, clever Gran disguises it from the dreaded Matron who steals Aboriginal babies. Soon Joe leaves prison, just as broken as before. Yet healing comes as Joe slips his grandmother’s ring onto Mary’s finger under the trees, naming their child Jimmy as a symbol of resilience. Their loyal friend Billy secures permits for Joe and Mary to escape Moore River forever. As the play poignantly ends, Joe carries little Jimmy towards freedom, walking away from bondage into an uncertain but liberated future.

► Historical injustice

Through the Millimurras’ story, *No Sugar* highlights the cruelty of Australia’s past assimilation policies where mixed-race children were taken from Aboriginal parents to be raised in white institutions, denied cultural access. The barriers stopping Aboriginal peoples’ basic freedoms to work, travel, marry and raise families as they wished are emphasized. *No Sugar* confronted 1980s Australian audiences with the nation’s unreconciled history of dispossession and forced integration into white culture. While the overt control *No Sugar* shows has ended, many underlying inequities and attitudes remain today.

No Sugar quickly moves through key events in the 1920s-30s Aboriginal policy in Western Australia, with each act about a year apart. The play assumes some familiarity with Australia’s locations as it shifts between the town of Northam and Moore River Settlement. For international audiences,

► Cultural context

► Universal colonial themes

► Rebel

► Steadfast leaders

► Brave resistance

► Authoritarian oppressor

a brief introduction could provide useful background on Australia's colonial past. Specifically, the widespread removal of Aboriginal children from families to 'protect' mixed-descent children and assimilate them into white culture. These practices inflicted profound intergenerational trauma and damage to Indigenous bonds that Australia still deals with.

While firmly historical, the hardships in *No Sugar* resonate with colonized Indigenous peoples' experiences globally still today. The play speaks to Australian but also universal themes of survival despite injustice, identity amid rupture, resisting dehumanization, and unbreakable family/cultural bonds.

3.2.4 Analysis of Key Characters

Jimmy Munday - Jimmy Munday is Milly's reckless older brother who likes drinking and causing trouble. Though he cares deeply for his family, Jimmy's wild spirit often leads him to anger racist officials like Constable Riggs. Having become disillusioned with the Millimurra family's seemingly hopeless fight against injustice, Jimmy struggles with frustration and despair over their situation.

Sam and Milly Millimurra - As the elders leading the Millimurra clan, Sam and Milly serve as pillars of strength and conviction. Sam spearheads bold escape plans and routinely stands up to colonial injustice, while Milly holds the family together through her abundant love and care. Their steadfast resolve gives their teenage son Joe the courage to protect Mary.

Joe Millimurra - The bold and defiant son of Sam and Milly, Joe Millimurra models his father's integrity even as he resists authority like his uncle Jimmy. Though still a teenager, Joe has the inner strength to find ways for him and Mary to sneak off together without relying on the approval of prejudiced whites. His goal of protecting Mary imbues Joe with exceptional bravery in the face of racial oppression.

Mr. Neville - The real-life bureaucrat Mr A.O. Neville ruled with uncontrolled power over all Aboriginal Australians as Chief Protector. Neville's toxic mix of racism and self-righteousness allowed him to forcibly relocate entire indigenous families without remorse. His patronizing speeches justifying human rights violations claimed the government was selflessly "civilizing the natives."

Mr. and Mrs. Neal - As Moore River Settlement



► Duality and hypocrisy

► Resilience & determination

► Racism and discrimination

► Colonial attitudes

► Cultural suppression

administrators, Mr and Mrs Neal represent the two-faced colonial child removal system. While Mrs Neal cares for sick children, Mr Neal sexually exploits young Aboriginal girls and beats anyone who resists. This contrast between public charity and private degeneracy condemns Australia's entire "protection" fraud as completely bankrupt.

Mary - Mary is a young Aboriginal girl Joe meets imprisoned at Moore River. Her refusal to submit to Mr Neal's sexual advances forced brave but doomed escape attempts. Upon recapture, Mary's resulting pregnancy and maternal instincts finally give her the courage to stop fearing officials. With new passion, Mary resolves to stand up against the sexual slavery inflicted on her people.

3.2.5 Thematic Analysis of No Sugar

3.2.5.1 Racism

The difference between black and white people is very noticeable in Australia after it became independent, and the theme of racism affects every interaction between Aboriginals and white Australians in the play. Aboriginals cannot drink alcohol, walk outside after dark, go beyond what the government says, or marry without permission, because of their race. They also receive less than a third of the welfare money white Australians get. White people often call them "abos" in a negative way and treat them as if they are inferior.

All the characters suffer from racism, including the three youngest ones, Joe, Cissie and David. Joe cuts one hundred posts for a white man and only gets some old boots and tough meat as payment, not any money. David and Cissie are only children but still experience racism at school, where they are given bruised apples with holes while the white children get big, tasty ones. Racism is deeply embedded in Australian society and connects to the colonial attitudes white Australians have towards Aboriginals.

3.2.5.2 Assimilation

The era the play is set in, the 1920s and 30s, was a time when white Australians forced Aboriginals to conform to Western society's norms to suppress their culture. Many mixed-race Australians were born then as people tried to remove Aboriginality from Australia.

Assimilation is a major theme in the play. The Chief Protector of Aborigines, Mr Neville, sums up the assimilation

► Forced assimilation

ethic in his Australia Day speech: “It doesn’t hurt to remind yourselves that you are preparing yourselves here to take your place in Australian society, to live as other Australians live, and to live alongside other Australians.” According to Mr Neville, the ultimate goal in regards to Aboriginals was not to accept their culture but to reduce it and make them think more like Westerners who live the same as white Australians.

► Loss of freedom

3.2.5.3 Protectionism

Protectionism is another common theme seen most clearly in how white people in charge of Aboriginals act. White officials treat Indigenous people in a condescending way, trying to “protect natives from themselves”. It is because of this that Aboriginals cannot drink alcohol. As a Justice of the Peace says: “It is my duty to protect natives and half-castes from alcohol.” While protectionism claims to “protect” people, its use in early 20th century Australia caused more harm than good for Aboriginals by completely limiting their freedom.

► Resilient family bonds

3.2.5.4 Family

While the Millimurra and Munday families can be dysfunctional at times and certainly live in harsh conditions, all characters try hard to maintain strong family bonds throughout the play. Even when separated, like when Jimmy goes to jail or when Joe and Mary leave home for safety, the relationships between family members stay strong. When reunited, they appreciate their connections. It is family life that protects these Aboriginals, who know they are stronger together than alone.

► Cultural resilience

3.2.5.5 Connection to the Past and Tradition

Despite obvious attempts by white officials to assimilate Aboriginals and destroy their culture, staying connected to Indigenous traditions matters to each Millimurra family member. This link to the past is best shown through Gran, who has lived her traditional culture without modern influence the longest. When families no longer get soap in rations and Cissie worries about washing her hair, Gran assures her she can “use tjeerung bush”, proving the traditional ways are much more reliable than modern bureaucratic systems.

► Language preservation

Another way Aboriginals must keep their culture and tradition is by using their own languages. Speaking native languages means the tradition can continue into future



generations, despite the prevalence of English.

3.2.5.6 Resistance

While the Millimuras are careful about staying safe under the violent, oppressive system governing them, they also often resist their oppression. When they have grievances, they visit various authorities' offices and demand better treatment. Gran, Jimmy, Joe and Mary best represent the spirit of resistance. When the family gets sent to Moore River Reserve, Gran makes a huge fuss about not being allowed to bring her dog. Throughout the play, Jimmy boldly speaks truth to power. He dies mid-rant against the hypocrisy of their so-called "protectors". Joe inherits his uncle's fighting spirit, and even the meek Mary fights back when Mr Neal tries to force her to work at the hospital.

- ▶ Speaking truth to power

3.2.5.7 Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is a major theme, seen especially in the white characters' actions. They create arbitrary rules and limits, devalue Aboriginal lives but frame their actions as generous and caring. Mr Neville, Mr Neal and Mr Carrol are all motivated more by personal ambition and looking heroic than actually protecting or helping the people they control.

- ▶ Self-serving officials

3.2.6 Symbol of the Quandong

This tart red fruit signals both the resilience of Aboriginal culture and the bitterness caused by oppression. Replacing keys to handcuffs with quandongs represents shedding white justice, but the fruit's sourness echoes the suffering still experienced under racist institutions.

- ▶ Quandong & Bittersweet symbolism

By using real events and political figures, Davis brings to international awareness the ongoing human rights violations occurring right up through the 1930s and perpetuated today against Australia's native people. Universal themes of inequality, family perseverance and youth-inspiring hope allow the message of No Sugar to resonate deeply with all audiences.

- ▶ Highlighting injustice

3.2.7 Important Quotes from the Play

"We never shifted out, we was booted out.": Joe corrects the lies of the white officials. They say his people chose to leave their land. They say his people wanted to shift to new places. But it is not true. Joe's people did not choose to leave. They were forced out violently. They were kicked off their

- ▶ Correcting false narratives

homelands where they had lived for countless years. Joe makes this clear. He says “We were booted out.” Soldiers came with guns. They drove Joe’s people away like animals. They marched them hundreds of miles with no food or water. Joe’s tribe died of sadness. The soldiers did not care. They let Joe’s people beg in towns and steal white flour to barely survive. The white officials try to hide this ugly history that stole Joe’s culture. But Joe sets the record straight with the truth.

- ▶ Ongoing threat of violence

“*Too late to adopt the Tasmanian solution.*”: A policeman named Carrol makes a casual cruel joke. He suggests killing all Aboriginals, as was done in Tasmania. Over 10,000 natives were murdered there until almost none were left by the 1830s. Carrol thinks this genocide was a clever solution. He jokes it is too bad Australia did not completely wipe out all its natives too. Carrol’s cruel words show many whites still want ethnic cleansing. Officials like him would not feel any remorse hurting even children like Gracie and killing Aboriginal families. The horrible history of murder in Tasmania gets ignored and erased now instead of learned from. But Carrol’s joke reminds us how racism against Aboriginals is still very strong in Australia. Very few white leaders speak against violence. So, it threatens Joe’s people still today.

- ▶ Dehumanizing control

“*If the Aborigines Department give us permission.*”: Joe has to ask the Aborigines Department if he can marry Mary. Grown-up Aboriginals have to request basic rights from the government as kids do. This shows how deeply racist it is that officials control even loving choices between partners which isn’t anybody else’s business. The same department taking mothers’ children away now also sticks its nose into marriages. For many, many years, Aboriginal people have felt powerless waiting for a stamped “yes” before living normal lives. White officials behave as if they grasp Aboriginal people’s best interests better without even querying what individuals require. Australia still behaves like First Peoples can’t make any conclusions for themselves without others checking on them. It’s humiliating control aiming to break down self-confidence, independence and family ties.

“*I am appalled by this disgraceful demonstration of ingratitude.*”: The Chief Protector is Mr Neville. When Aboriginal parents protest about their children being taken from them, he gets angry. He thinks they should be grateful for any horrible abuse his systems force them to live under. Mr

► Accusation and trauma

Neville believes taking children away is helping “primitive” people, so he will not stop doing it. He refuses to listen to the grief and trauma of families broken apart by racist policies. Even tiny babies get taken by this programme designed to remove black heritage. Still, Mr Neville gets very angry and shames natural feelings of injustice from suffering parents. This shows he can’t tolerate the truth of oppression from voices he has silenced. He wants to destroy bonds between generations but demands thanks for it.

► Reclaiming birth-right

“That your country. You back sit down that place.”: An aboriginal elder named Billy reconnects Joe to his ancestral roots. Though officials drove Joe’s people off their lands, Billy teaches that the homeland still knows and remembers its people. He tells Joe that Northam always will be his true tribal country no matter who currently claims deeds. Billy reminds Joe that cells of his ancestor’s sweat and blood soaked into the earth will call to him forever. Racist myths sought to make natives feel dead to their territory’s spirit. But Billy’s wisdom inspires Joe to demand his birthright again. Sitting down on one’s land claims what whites and papers cannot revoke.

► Defiant rage

“Fuck youse!”: Mary screams curse words at her abusive supervisor Neal. He laughs at her skin colour and touches Mary without consent. When Mary keeps working with dignity, Neal punishes her cruelly. He cares nothing about the harassment faced. Every day evil men like Neal use their power to humiliate First Nations women. When Mary finally reclaims her voice and tells him off, it is a defiant stand for generations of women and girls who quietly endured racism and sexual harassment from employers with no accountability. Her rage is the unleashed fury of all who were silently mistreated. Though the outburst may get Mary fired, the courage gives hope. It motivates others who see that truth can no longer be stomped out.

Summarised Overview

This unit analysed the acclaimed play *No Sugar* by Jack Davis. Set in 1920s-30s Australia, it depicts the Millimurra family of Aboriginal Australians facing racism and oppression. They get forcibly relocated to inhospitable Moore River Settlement under assimilation policies seeking to eliminate Indigenous culture. Yet *No Sugar* shows resilience as the Millimurras resist domination.

Major themes highlighted institutional racism, family bonds, cultural tradition and bureaucracies controlling Aboriginal lives. Davis used real events and figures for historical accuracy about Australia's colonial harms still denied or downplayed. Discussions connected Australia's unreconciled past seen in *No Sugar* to the current inequities First Nations peoples face. Despite the tragedy, *No Sugar* conveyed hope as today's generations inherit their ancestors' strong spirit.

Assignments

1. How does the setting of *No Sugar* establish the power dynamics between Aboriginal and white Australian characters?
2. Compare and contrast how different characters in *No Sugar* resist or accommodate injustice from authorities.
3. What dramatic purpose is served by the conflicts and complexities shown within the Millimurra family?
4. Explain the thematic significance of the quandong's symbolism in the play.
5. What lessons from the historical oppression depicted in *No Sugar* can be applied to present-day social justice issues?

Suggested Reading

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SGOU



Unit 3

Enchantment and Sorrow

- **Gabrielle Toy**

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse how Roy's writing was shaped by her experiences as a French-Canadian woman.
- ▶ identify and discuss major themes in *Enchantment and Sorrow*.
- ▶ examine passages from the memoir and explain Roy's transportive descriptive powers.
- ▶ discuss the memoir's significance.

Background

Canadian autobiographical writing has a rich tradition spanning from early colonial diaries to contemporary memoirs interrogating cultural identity. Though often overshadowed by the nation's revered fiction, Canadian autobiographies provide crucial insights into the eclectic lives and social realities that have shaped this complex country.

The origins of English Canadian autobiography reach back to the 17th and 18th centuries when European settlers and explorers like Samuel de Champlain wrote journals documenting their perilous voyages and rough frontier existence. Into the 19th century, personal narratives from itinerant labourers, farmers, sportspeople, and politicians offered glimpses into the challenges faced by average working people as Canada took shape. Following Confederation and increasing urbanization, the early 20th century saw more polished memoirs from the likes of artist Emily Carr and trailblazing doctor Maude Abbott that unpacked their unconventional lives while critically examining gender roles and social mores of the age. This growth of perspective diversity in life writing accelerated rapidly from the 1960s onward with urgent works giving voice to marginalized groups. Chinese Canadian writer Evelyn Lau's confessional accounts about youth and addiction in Vancouver or Anishinaabe lawyer and actor Billy Merasty's searing residential school testimony *Breaking the Silence* shone a light on often-ignored realities. Contemporary masters like Michael Ondaatje have continued broadening the memoir form through sophisticated literary experiments marrying personal history with national myth. First Nations leaders, LGBTQ2 pioneers, and new Canadians from



diverse diasporas now inject the landscape of Canadian life writing with a stunning plurality of stories that reveal intricate layers of identity. Though frequently dominated by names like Margaret Atwood or Alice Munro, Canada's incredible assortment of memoirs and autobiographies expose indelible truths about this manifold country's past and its possibilities moving forward.

Keywords

French Canadian, Gender roles, Isolation, Artistic awakening, Cultural identity, Bildungsroman, Prairie

Discussion

3.3.1 Gabrielle Roy

Gabrielle Roy (1909-1983) is considered one of the most important French-Canadian novelists of the 20th century. Born in Saint Boniface, Manitoba, Roy drew extensively from her prairie upbringing in her works. Though she moved to Europe as an adult and travelled extensively, her writings poignantly capture small-town Canadian life.

► Roy captured grasslands

Roy worked as a teacher and lecturer for many years before dedicating herself full-time to writing. Her first published novel, *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945, translated as *The Tin Flute*), instantly established her as a leading voice in Canadian literature. Set in the Saint-Henri neighbourhood of Montreal during WWII, the novel explores themes of poverty and female emancipation. It won Roy widespread acclaim, including the prestigious French literature award *Femina*.

► On poverty and emancipation

Among her most celebrated works is the semi-autobiographical *La Petite Poule d'Eau* (1950, translated as *Where Nests the Water Hen*). This nostalgic novel about a young girl teaching in rural Manitoba earned Roy the Governor General's Literary Award. Other key works of fiction include *Alexandre Chenevert* (1953), *Street of Riches* (1955), and *Children of My Heart* (1977).

► Recalling Manitoba





Fig. 3.3.1 Gabrielle Roy in 1945

► On ordinary people

In the last decade of her life, Roy turned to memoir writing, publishing *La Détresse et l'enchantement* in 1984. This work, translated as *Enchantment and Sorrow*, offers a lyrical reflection on her early life and development as an author. Roy passed away less than a year after its publication. Today, she is remembered as one of Canada's most distinguished authors whose depictions of ordinary people left an extraordinary literary mark.

3.3.2 Introduction to the *Enchantment and Sorrow*

► Prairie life

Published in 1984, Gabrielle Roy's posthumously released autobiography *Enchantment and Sorrow* movingly captures the magic and struggles of her prairie upbringing. The book spans Roy's childhood into her early 30s, concluding around the breakthrough success of her first novel in 1945. *Enchantment* refers to the almost fairytale-like wonder of her early years in Saint Boniface, a predominantly French-speaking area of Manitoba. *Sorrow* represents the ensuing hardships poverty, depression, war that Roy grappled with on her path to becoming an esteemed author.

► Recreating past

While often overshadowed by Roy's fiction, *Enchantment and Sorrow* is essential for understanding the experiences that shaped her distinct literary aesthetics and social perspectives. Roy's tranquil writing style masterfully transports readers into important memories of people and places from her past.

According to critic François Ricard, nowhere else does she manage to recreate the very texture of childhood with such intimacy and vividness.

3.3.3 Summary of *Enchantment and Sorrow*

The book opens with fond recollections of Roy's family and childhood in Saint Boniface's close-knit Francophone community. She movingly describes her home by the Red River. The house stood in the very midst of enchantment. From the doorstep, the whole sweep of the river could be seen curving gently. Inside, her mother's voice fills the house with gaiety and laughter. Though the family has limited means, the love between Roy's parents and their nine children fosters a warmth no money can buy.

- ▶ Happy childhood home

Roy paints an idyllic scene of her early years, enveloped in the affection of her large family and the natural splendour of the river landscapes. The family's happiness, despite modest finances, underscores a richness of spirit. Still, even in these early passages, hints of distress to come shadow Roy's lyrical remembrances.

- ▶ Joy and sorrow of youth

When Roy turns seven, she begins school at the strict Catholic institution Académie Saint-Joseph. Here Roy receives her first exposure to books and writing. Despite the school's rigid atmosphere, Roy becomes immediately dazzled by the richness of language, enthralled by authors like Longfellow. This early enchantment with literature quickly collides with new tensions though, as adolescence strains against family expectations and gender conformity. Roy often wept in her pillow at night for her lost freedom. She felt imprisonment stretching out before her in life as a woman. Even while beginning to chafe against prescribed female roles, her passion for literature grows. She loved books, and read secretly at night by the light of the moon.

- ▶ Both constraint and inspiration in books

These school years mark Roy's initial passage out of childhood innocence into recognition of narrowing choices for women and an awakening desire for education and creative outlet. The descriptions reveal a young woman of fervent intellect and sensibility, one keen to drink in all the inspiration literature offers even as societal forces seek to rein in her aspirations.

- ▶ Recalling awakening tensions

At sixteen, desperate to pursue her studies, Roy takes on



- ▶ Roy taught, overwhelmed

her first teaching post at a tiny remote country schoolhouse lacking electricity or plumbing. She movingly conveys the difficulties of this new responsibility. Though deeply dedicated to her pupils, the work soon overwhelms her, leaving Roy feeling paralysed and painfully alone in her duties.

- ▶ Witnessing inequality and anguish

Roy's portraits of early teaching hardships reveal the emotional toll of isolation. Far removed from her family in rough frontier schools, she grapples with self-doubt and longing for connection. Her distress escalates when later assigned to a distant Indigenous village. Surrounded by families denied basic rights and ravaged by diseases of poverty, Roy sees up close the injustice of blatant discrimination. She felt like an exile living in distress among people who were themselves exiles many times over. Profoundly unsettled by this stark inequality, Roy's distress turns outward to fully recognize the anguish of others.

- ▶ Gaining perspective but lacking belonging

These searing experiences as a young teacher expand Roy's perspective and social awareness, even as she continues wrestling with solitude and purpose. At twenty, desperate for an absolution, she enrolls in teacher's college in Winnipeg, immersing herself in French literature, theatre, and the welcome bustle of city crowds after years in remote outposts. For two years she enjoyed the rich academic and urban stimulation she craved. However, distress returns upon graduating when she is assigned to another small, insular Manitoba town. Set apart as an outsider, Roy laments the sorrow of her life as a teacher was this lack of belonging anywhere.

- ▶ At England

Though relieved to engage in vibrant cultural and intellectual scenes again during college, Roy ultimately remains adrift, detached from any community she can truly call her own. She carries this restless longing for purpose when she sails to England at twenty-six, disheartened by teaching posts.

3.3.4 Analysis and Interpretation

- ▶ Solace and purpose in literature

Several interconnected themes run through *Enchantment and Sorrow* that offer insight into Roy's values as a writer. Most prominently, her reverence for language and storytelling permeates the memoir. From her earliest classroom days, Roy displays an ardent love of reading. Books become a refuge amidst external troubles a portable magic. Her fervour to keep learning and passion for French works infuses Roy with determination to become a teacher and later a writer.

The memoir also extensively explores notions of gender

- ▶ Sorrow of disillusioned ambitions

- ▶ Roy wrote from loneliness

- ▶ Roy mapped inner landscapes

- ▶ Roy found magic in words

roles and societal expectations of women. Roy frequently bumps against barriers restricting her academic and professional aspirations. Her distress is palpable in passages about abandoning her studies and a dream job to assist her family during her mother's illness. Such examples underscore Roy's firsthand experience with the limitations imposed upon intelligent and ambitious young women at the time.

Loneliness and isolation serve as a recurring depressive force during Roy's young adulthood. Whether stuck in remote teaching posts or adrift in London, she grapples with not feeling at home nor having a supportive community. Her writing seems both to stem from these lonely years while also helping assuage them through creative catharsis.

Importantly, Roy's linkage between geographical spaces and her state of mind is another theme presented. The prairies are associated with the bliss of childhood; the country schools with distress. England breeds greater isolation, while Quebec represents rebirth. Through spare yet transportive descriptions, Roy maps her interior terrain onto exterior landscapes. *Enchantment and Sorrow* offers a perceptive bildungsroman chronicling Roy's emergence into acclaimed authorship. The memoir provides rare insight into the sensitive soul and roaming mind behind some of 20th century Canada's most resonant works of fiction.

3.3.5 Thematic Discussion

The central themes in *Enchantment and Sorrow* offer illuminating windows into both Gabrielle Roy's inner landscape as a woman and artist as well as wider social realities confronting French Canadians during the early 1900s.

3.3.5.1 Language, Storytelling and Artistic Awakening

From the outset, Roy presents an intense reverence for language, literature and self-expression. She vividly recounts her childhood fascination upon first learning to write, sparking a lifelong passion for reading. Books become a magical portal offering escape, adventure and ideas that transform her provincial world. Describing works by Virgil and Plato, Roy reflects on what magic words on a page turn into such dazzling houses of light.

This passion for language aligns with her growing ambition to become a writer. Roy links her love of words with a desire

► Against loneliness

► Gender stratifications

► From loneliness to belonging

► An inspiration

to deploy them creatively to depict people and places familiar to her. She sees writing as a means to combat loneliness. Her writing emerges from the wellspring of experience gathered over the years, feeling out-of-step and adrift. The end of the memoir represents the triumph of finally finding purpose, catharsis, and acclaim as a novelist.

3.3.5.2 Gender Bias and Societal Limitations

Roy also offers frequent examples of rigid gender stratifications hampering her education and career. Her account of balancing studies with familial caretaking duties will resonate as an all-too-common struggle for young women then and now. Giving up a hard-won office job at age sixteen to tend to her mother seems a bitter turning point, closing off higher education and taking up teaching work out of necessity. Her eventual writing success can be seen as a defiance of forces that conspired to limit a woman of her keen intellect and talents.

3.3.5.3 The Problem of Isolation and Belonging

Linked to gender role constraints, Roy's passages on loneliness lend the memoir a frequently melancholy tone. She recounts painful protracted stretches as a teacher in which her abilities go overlooked and companionship unforthcoming. Rural postings lead to an alienating winter of distress. Doubly marginalized as a young unmarried French Catholic in predominately Protestant towns, Roy contends with being viewed as an outsider everywhere she turns. This sense of isolation appears only to increase when she moves to England. There too Roy remains on the margins of a bustling alien society. These dispiriting years set the stage for her rebirth as part of Quebec's thriving artistic scene. There at last through connections and acclaim, her loneliness lifts with a feeling of purposeful belonging.

Enchantment and Sorrow has enjoyed renewed interest in recent years for the resonance it offers contemporary readers, especially in light of evolving conversations about gender roles and cultural identity in Canada. Roy's unflinching chronicling of systemic biases facing Quebecois women of her era sparks important dialogues about evolving feminism and empowerment. Passages convey a sense of injustice and thwarted opportunity likely familiar to many students today. Roy's perseverance can serve as inspiration that hardship need not forestall accomplishment.

- ▶ Bridging empathy and understanding

Similarly, Roy's experiences as part of a marginalized French-speaking minority in earlier 20th-century Canada parallel cultural estrangements confronting diverse student bodies today. Her measured prose offers bridges of empathy and understanding across differences. Lastly, *Enchantment* stands as a masterwork contribution to the bildungsroman literary tradition. Roy transforms the familiar coming-of-age conventions through the specificity of a French-Canadian woman's lens. In doing so, she crafts an enduring work that transcends boundaries to speak to the universal through precise particulars.

Summarised Overview

Gabrielle Roy's posthumously published memoir *Enchantment and Sorrow* nostalgically yet unflinchingly captures the wonders and struggles coming of age as a French Canadian woman in early 20th century Manitoba. Through spare yet transportive prose, Roy maps her inner terrain onto the exterior prairie landscapes that shaped her. Central themes examined include a reverence for language and literature, systemic gender biases that hamper Roy's ambitions, a melancholy sense of alienation in remote teaching posts and abroad, and ultimately artistic rebirth through writing. The memoir transcends boundaries as both a specific woman's emergence into authorship and a universal story about the power of creativity to combat loneliness.

Assignments

1. Contrast Roy's portrayal of Saint Boniface and rural teaching posts. What does this suggest about identity and isolation themes?
2. Identify and analyze a key passage showing Roy's artistic passion. How does this relate to her development as a writer?
3. Discuss examples of gender bias Roy encountered. How did societal limitations shape her path?
4. Explain the significance of the memoir's title. What do "enchantment" and "sorrow" represent?
5. What aspect of Roy's memoir still resonates for contemporary readers? Why?
6. Situate the memoir within Roy's body of fiction writing. What continuity do you see?



Suggested Reading

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Unit 4

Voss

- Patrick White

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ understand the life and key themes in Patrick White's writing
- ▶ summarise the plot and main characters of the novel *Voss*
- ▶ analyse major themes and symbolism used in *Voss*
- ▶ explain how *Voss* explores ambition, nature, and Australia's landscape

Background

Australian novels have a distinct style and voice that captures the culture and landscapes of the country. Early Australian literature in the 1800s included journals of explorers discovering the frontier, as well as novels by ex-convicts and settlers. Common themes were the harsh bush life and conflicts with Indigenous peoples. Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson led the Bulletin school of writers who romanticized the bush and outback in iconic poems and short stories.

In the 1900s, modernist voices like Patrick White emerged. White's generation often studied overseas before returning home, blending European existentialism and experimentation with distinctly Australian themes. Life in rural communities and the emptiness of the outback feature strongly across 20th-century Australian literature. Novels like *The Secret River* (2005) by Kate Grenville and *That Deadman Dance* (2010) by Kim Scott showcase the frontier mentality's complex morality. Other recent award-winning authors like Tim Winton, David Malouf, and Geraldine Brooks put unique spins on coming-of-age in an unforgiving yet beautiful land.

These days, Australian writing is globally famous for making universal human stories shaped by the southern half of the world. Rough landscapes, First Nations culture, the history of convict camps, bush legends, and multicultural voices from Sydney and Melbourne all combine into rich stories investigating identity, not belonging, family, spirits, truth, memory, and more. Different voices show how European traditions mix with over 40,000 years of Aboriginal tales tied to ancestral grounds. Whether tragic or comic, Australian novels exhibit humour and derision alongside haunting beauty.



Keywords

Landscape, Environment, Ambition, Conquest, Settlement, Multiculturalism, Literature

Discussion

3.4.1 Patrick White

Patrick White is widely regarded as one of Australia's greatest novelists. Over his long and prolific career, spanning nearly six decades from the 1930s to the 1980s, White produced 12 acclaimed novels, three short story collections, several plays, and other writings. He was instrumental in putting Australian literature on the global map.

Born in England in 1912 to Australian parents, White was taken to Australia as an infant. There, he lived in and explored rural New South Wales, experiences which would later inspire much of his writing. As a child, White was a voracious reader, enjoying classic European literature by the likes of Dickens, Tolstoy, and Proust. This set the foundations for his literary career, which drew on both Australian landscape and culture alongside Western literary traditions.

After some travel and time abroad in the late 1920s and 1930s, White settled back in Australia, just as the country was heading towards World War II. He served as an ambulance driver during the war. He also got his break as an established author during this time. By the 1950s, he had firmly cemented his reputation in Australia and internationally with works like *The Tree of Man* (1955).

▶ Australian literary icon

▶ English-born Australian novelist

▶ Ambulance driver turned acclaimed author

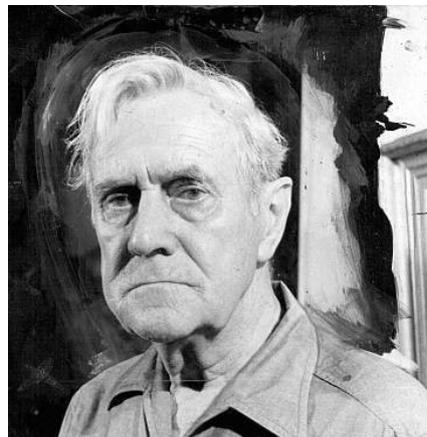


Fig. 3.4.1 Patrick White

► Spirituality

Several key themes run strongly through Patrick White's body of work. He took an unusual angle on life in the Australian bush, using language in fresh new ways to explore the complex inner lives of 'ordinary' Australian people, often looking at their relationship to the stark, beautiful, but unforgiving landscape. Spirituality was another common theme for White. His prose was poetic but also earthy, vividly capturing physical realities alongside inner worlds.

► Literary trailblazer

White's writing broke new ground not just for Australian literature but literature worldwide. He brought modernist sensibilities to Australian subject matter, as well as a psychological depth and richness more commonly found in European masters like Dostoyevsky. At the same time, his work was distinctly Australian, incorporating Australian speech patterns and showcasing the true diversity of Australian life. White earned numerous accolades over his lifetime. In 1973, he made history by becoming the first and only Australian writer to be awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature. The Nobel Committee praised the "epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature." White also turned down a knighthood, sceptical of such honours.

► Influential literary legacy

White opened the door for a new generation of talented Australian writers across multiple genres. He demonstrated that Australian literature could tackle profound existential concerns while still showcasing a uniquely Australian voice and perspective. Writers like Tim Winton, David Malouf, Kate Grenville and many more have all been influenced to some degree by White's pioneering work. He made space for diverse Australian stories to take their place within the Western literary canon, helping shape an ongoing flourishing Australian literary tradition.

► *Voss*: Exploration and desolation

3.4.2 Background to *Voss*

Voss, published in 1957 as the fifth novel by Patrick White, is loosely inspired by the tragic story of Prussian explorer Ludwig Leichhardt, who vanished whilst attempting to traverse Australia from east to west in 1848. The author uses this historical event as a jumping-off point for a fictional tale exploring inner and outer journeys against the backdrop of a fascinating yet unforgiving land. The novel is set in colonial Australia in the 1840s-50s. The early sections take place on a pastoralist property near Sydney, allowing the author to contrast settler living with the unmodified wilderness beyond.

The core of the novel sees the protagonist leading a small expedition into the blistering heat and arid terrain of the Australian interior on a mission to cross the entire continent. Australia is portrayed as both alluring and menacing - drawing people in whilst threatening to swallow them whole.

► Ambitious loner

Voss, the main character of the book, is an odd German loner fueled by ego and ambition, determined to defeat the desert. With him is a group including convicts, Aboriginal guides and more. The other key character is a free-thinking Sydney woman who forms a spiritual bond with the explorer despite never meeting him in person. Their interlinked tales allow the writer to explore Australia's settler history through two contrasting perspectives colliding with the ancient land. The book is rich with symbolism open to interpretation. Flowing through the work are themes tied to Australia's identity and relationship with the land. The desert comes to represent both the potential and indifference of Australia – offering glory but able to destroy those unprepared for its harshness. The author also examines pioneer mindsets, slavery and colonisation through his varied cast of characters.

► Australian epic

The book asks what inner strength pioneers and settlers needed to face the Australian bush and environment. The main character thinks he can overcome the land through pure willpower, but ultimately it may overcome him instead. The woman meanwhile connects more spiritually, entering a dreamlike state between worlds. Upon release, the book cemented the author's fame. Today, it stands as a distinctive Australian epic, acknowledged as one of the great books exploring Australia's landscape and the complex humans crossing it.

► Australian expedition

3.4.3 Summary of *Voss*

Johann Ulrich Voss is a German botanist who has travelled to Australia with the sole intention of making an expedition across the whole country. Voss has an unusual, solitary personality and is obsessed with exploring this unknown territory. After spending two years in Australia, during which time he has done some minor lone expeditions, he has gained the backing of a wealthy sponsor, Mr Bonner, and assembled four companions to join him on his journey. These men are Harry Robarts, a simple yet strong young man, Frank Le Mesurier, a cynical youth without purpose, Palfreyman, a reverend and bird enthusiast, and an alcoholic named Turner.



- ▶ Voss connects with Laura

At Mr Bonner's residence, Voss encounters Laura Trevelyan, Mr and Mrs Bonner's orphaned niece whom they adopted. Laura and Voss don't like each other initially, but during a picnic, they talk about his expedition and realise they understand one another better than anyone around them. A week before Voss leaves, Mrs Bonner hosts a party to mark the expedition's departure, saying it's a nationally important event. After dinner, Laura goes into the garden and admits to Voss that she finds him fascinating but is worried for him. Voss says he reckons she would like to pray for him but he does not believe in God. Laura replies "I will learn to pray." He pictures her prayers, "like little pieces of white paper" following him across Australia's vast interior.

- ▶ Voss proposes to Laura

Voss's group travels by sea to Newcastle on a ship called the Osprey, then continues on horseback to Rhine Towers, home of expedition backer Mr Sanderson. There they meet two more men Bonner recommended join them - Angus, a prosperous landowner, and Judd, an ex-convict. After staying at Rhine Towers for several days, they set off for Jildra, their last stop before venturing into Australia's little-known centre. On Voss's final night with the Sandersons, he writes to Laura proposing marriage and asking her to send an answer to Jildra. She does, and he receives it on his last evening there. Laura writes that they both have flaws and arrogance, but she will grapple with their "mutual hatefulness" and pray together if he will too.

- ▶ Voss loses cattle

The expedition departs Jildra, travelling into the desert. Voss has clear visions of Laura and feels spiritually connected to her. They camp for Christmas, but over half their cattle are stolen. More animals perish and they have to camp again when Voss gets kicked by an injured mule. When one of their Aboriginal guides, elderly Dugald, asks to return to Jildra, Voss gives him a letter for Laura. However, Dugald believes white people use writing to remove oppressive thoughts and tear up the letter.

- ▶ Voss heads into an unknown desert

The Bonners' housekeeper Rose gives birth to an illegitimate baby called Mercy but soon passes away. Laura, who felt the agony of pregnancy and birth as if her own, cares for the child and tells Voss this news, saying the girl brings her joy alongside him. Meanwhile, Voss heads west into the desert where he can't receive letters. Heavy rain and sickness, especially Frank's, force them to shelter in a cave. While crossing a river to reach the cave their supplies and

navigational tools are lost when a raft overturns. Voss suspects Judd's plans to seize control.

► Adoption plan

The Bonners want Laura to relinquish Mercy, arguing that caring for the baby would hinder marriage chances. They arrange an adoption but the wife decides against it, saying Mercy would have too many mothers. Laura attends a ball for Belle Bonner's wedding to Lieutenant Radclyffe. Returning home early morning, Laura writes to Voss but realises it can't reach him and tears it up.

► Voss dies

Voss's group finally leaves the cave in spring, entering treacherous gully terrain. When Voss asks Judd to shoot an injured horse, he does but then angrily pelts it with stones. Later, Judd says he's returning to Jildra. Turner and Angus opt to join him and they split up, dividing supplies. Voss notices some natives following from afar. They camp near the three remaining expedition members upon finding water. Soon after, Frank cuts his own throat, and Harry dies. Finally, the natives slaughter their horses before Jackie, a guide from Jildra who now joined the tribe, beheads Voss.

► Laura defends Voss's legacy

Years on, Laura who is teaching at a girls' school, is invited to meet Colonel Hebden, a recently returned explorer who tried locating Voss. She protests when Hebden says they only met briefly and Voss had "horrible qualities". When Hebden says he'll go back to Jildra to continue the search, Laura discourages him. Yet, Hebden mounts a well-prepared desert expedition seeking Voss but finds nothing. He dreams about Judd, Angus and Turner, then turns back.

► Voss "is there in the country, and always will be"

Twenty more years later, a statue of Voss is unveiled in Sydney. Laura attends and meets a confused Judd, who gives muddled memories about Voss's death. Although claiming he left Voss in the desert, now he says he was there when Voss died from a spear. Laura says she is satisfied being told Voss "is there in the country, and always will be". That evening, when asked about Voss, she repeats these words at a party hosted by Belle.

3.4.4 Analysis of the Novel

Through evocative language and rich character development, White explores in *Voss* timeless and uniquely Australian themes of ambition, self-determination, and humankind's struggle to prevail over nature. The novel follows German-born explorer Johann Ulrich Voss, who arrives in Sydney

- ▶ Ambition versus nature

seeking backing for an expedition to cross Australia from west to east. Even in the opening pages, Voss exudes pride bordering on hubris, admitting “My God, besides, is above humility” when discussing religion with Laura Trevelyan, his eventual love interest. Laura recognizes the danger posed by Voss’s relentless ambition, pointedly asking him: “To maintain such standards of pride, in the face of what you must experience on this journey, is truly alarming.”

- ▶ Hopeless ambition versus harsh land

After securing funds from Sydney businessmen, Voss departs with a small band of men on an increasingly gruelling quest into the punishing Australian interior. At an early stop, station owner Boyle bluntly warns the explorer: “In stones and thorns...anyone who is disposed can celebrate a high old Mass, I do promise, with the skill of a blackfeller and his blood, in Central Australia.” It soon becomes clear that neither Voss nor his men are prepared for the merciless land that awaits: “All day the horses and the cattle swam through the grass sea. Their barrels rolled and gurgled.” This early foreshadowing makes the expedition’s fate painfully clear even before the party meets its inevitable doom. Through the ill-equipped Voss, White criticizes a brand of misbegotten colonial ambition that disregards brutal reality.

- ▶ Great bond amidst despair

As Voss’s party faces despair, he maintains an unusual connection with Laura Trevelyan, writing tenderly from the wilderness: “So we are riding together across the plains, we sit together in this black night. I reach over and touch your cheek (not for the first time).” Though the two are separated by enormous distance, White suggests they share a profound, if mysterious, psychic and spiritual bond. This culminates when Voss witnesses a comet blaze overhead just as Laura glimpses the same cosmic event from her sickbed, seeming to transcend physical reality.

- ▶ Ambition crushed by merciless land

White’s descriptions of the arid landscape emphasize that the desert, not any human force, will determine the party’s survival: “By now the tall grass was almost dry, so that there issued from it a sharper sighing when the wind blew. The wind bent the grass into tawny waves, on the crests of which floated the last survivors of flowers, shrivelled and were sucked under by the swell.” Despite warnings that his quest verges on suicide, Voss drags his men deeper into oblivion, where the land itself oppresses the interlopers: “the glassy eyes of the most rational of all animals were seeing far too clearly as they advanced into chaos.” Here Voss learns that not even

monomaniacal tenacity can overcome the indifference of the desert.

In the climax, Voss's ragged band perishes anti-climactically not in a blaze of glory but whimpering and collapsing from exposure: "Their barrels rolled and gurgled." In perhaps the ultimate irony, Voss ultimately falls not to hostile natives but to the environment itself, expiring anonymously like so many nameless men before him. Rather than lionise heroic conquest of the land, White paints a sobering picture of human frailty and self-deception in the face of nature's brute power. In this sense, *Voss*'s doomed quest for greatness serves as a metaphor for ambitions that end only in "irresistible disaster."

▶ Ambitions end in "irresistible disaster"

3.4.5 Character Sketch

Laura Trevelyan is an orphaned young woman who came to Australia to live with her uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Bonner. She is smart, idealistic and extremely sensitive. She forms a psychic bond with Voss after falling in love with him and sympathetically feels the pain of her maid Rose Portion during pregnancy and childbirth. Laura often seems distant and self-righteous but is very self-critical about these faults.

▶ Laura's empathy

Rose Portion is a former convict who works as a maid for the Bonners. She dies soon after giving birth to her illegitimate daughter Mercy. She is a dull, miserable woman who has had a hard life.

▶ Tragic maid

Johann Ulrich Voss is a German botanist who has come to Australia to explore the undiscovered continent. He is arrogant and solitary but can be friendly when needed for his expedition, which he is obsessed with. Voss disliked Laura at first but proposed marriage when he felt closer to her than anyone. During the expedition, he remains detached and often scornful.

▶ Exploring botanist

Edmund Bonner is a wealthy Sydney merchant who sponsors Voss's expedition. He cares a lot about money and comfort. Although generous with money, he expects to be appreciated for it and gets upset when he feels unacknowledged.

▶ Wealthy patron

Emmy Bonner is similar to her husband in her concern for social standing and material comfort. She worries a lot about her status.

▶ Worrier

Belle Bonner is the daughter of Emmy and Edmund. She is simple-minded but beautiful and loves her fiancé, Lieutenant

▶ Simple-minded



Radclyffe. She is very fond of her cousin Laura.

3.4.6 Thematic Analysis

3.4.6.1 Psychic Connection

- ▶ Laura's sickness and Voss' suffering

Voss proposes to Laura by letter and she accepts it the same way. Although they try writing, Voss is soon out of reach. However, their minds stay connected. Voss visualizes Laura enduring the same hardships as him. White makes clear this is more than normal sympathy. Laura's sickness links to Voss' suffering. He sees her with no hair just as her hair is cut. She is "locked inside him" despite barely knowing each other.

- ▶ Empathic bonds

The mental bond between Voss and Laura is central, but there are other examples too. Laura feels connected to Rose, feeling her baby and labour pains. After Rose's funeral, she wrote she "entered the earth, ocean and Rose's soul". Voss frequently lacks humanity but can envision how others feel. When Palfreyman describes his sister's suicide attempt, Voss narrates everyone's feelings and the scene's details. Before his death, he screams feeling the horses' pain. Even less caring characters form mental connections, often while dreaming or sleepy. Hebden sees Turner and Angus die in a dream. Earlier, Angus unexpectedly feels connected to Judd after saying everyone was "a bit mad".

3.4.6.2 Religion and Doubt

- ▶ Faith struggles

When they meet, Laura tells Voss she doesn't pray. He assumes she's an atheist. He doesn't respect atheists because he thinks they ascribe their flaws to the God they reject. But he equally scorns Christians like Palfreyman for being weak and gullible. Voss keeps returning to religion despite the hardships. But the men also have theological discussions. Angus is shocked that Turner doesn't believe in God and asks if he's unhappy as an atheist. Angus's Christianity was initially for the show, but the desert makes him ponder faith and doubt more deeply, like the others, especially Palfreyman who takes much "on trust".

Palfreyman has a sister with a hunchback who feels unacceptable and unworthy in the eyes of God. Palfreyman feels unable to help relieve her feelings of unworthiness by loving her in a Christ-like spiritual way, the way Christ loved all people unconditionally. Laura shares Palfreyman's struggle - like him, she doubts her own personal capacity for true charity and love towards others. She does not doubt

► Self-reflection and divine image

God's existence itself. Laura sees caring for Mercy physically as a practical solution to try and show charity. This caring nature demonstrates Laura and Voss' pragmatic and hands-on approach to life. In contrast, Voss creates God in his own self-image. Because of this, Voss doubts and questions himself just as little as he doubts and questions the existence of God. His self-assuredness extends to his view of the divine. His belief in himself is as steadfast as his belief in God.

► Joy of exploration

3.4.6.3 An Undiscovered Country

Voss comes to Australia for its infinite possibilities and magnificent discoveries. When asked if he has studied a map, he says he must draw one first, reasonably, since the interior area is largely unknown. Mr Pringle conventionally assumes he will find little but aboriginals and flies. Voss and Pringle are two people who seem to be explorers or adventurers of some kind. Voss asks Pringle if he has ever walked on the sea bed. Neither Voss nor Pringle have walked on the sea bed before. The joy comes from the process of exploration itself - venturing into new territories, seeing and doing things for the first time.

► Curiosity

Voss tells Le Mesurier that he has come to cross Australia from one side to the other. He feels strongly that he needs to do this, even though he can't fully explain why he is driven to explore. Voss is excited by the grandeur and magnificence of this journey, both for his own ego as an explorer and for the wonder of exploring the unknown. He has come from crowded Europe to the vast extremes of the Australian landscape, which gives him the chance to pursue boundless exploration. Despite the obvious dangers, Voss remains extremely curious and eager to understand the native peoples. This eagerness makes him underestimate the real risks.

► Inner drive to explore

But Voss is not the only one with this urge. Hebden also has a strong desire to constantly explore, even the harsh areas of Australia. This drive is so powerful that Hebden easily finds four friends willing to join a dangerous rescue mission for Voss. This was happening in the 1840s, after Captain Cook's voyages, when the unknown parts of Australia posed an irresistible challenge for men with a spirit of discovery and adventure.

Summarised Overview

Patrick White was a pioneering 20th century Australian writer who brought modernist techniques to Australian themes and landscapes, gaining international renown. His fifth novel *Voss*, published in 1957, centers on megalomaniacal German explorer Johann Voss. In the 1840s, Voss arrives in Sydney seeking investors for an expedition crossing Australia west to east. He exudes arrogance and excessive pride. Wealthy merchant Mr Bonner sponsors his trip. At a farewell dinner, Voss shockingly proposes by letter to Laura Trevelyan, Mr Bonner's orphaned niece. Though disliking Voss initially, Laura accepts. As Voss's party ventures into scorching deserts, he maintains a psychic bond with Laura, mysteriously envisioning her alongside him. Despite the land growing merciless, Voss drives his men deeper. When elderly guide Dugald wishes to turn back, Voss permits it but gives him a letter for Laura. Dugald destroys it, believing writing only removes thoughts.

As the group faces despair, Voss's connection with Laura intensifies into almost hallucinatory spirituality. However, unable to overcome nature's indifference, his men ultimately perish anti-climactically from exposure. In the climax, Voss himself is killed by natives, including a former guide now allied to local tribes.

Years later, Laura – now a teacher – is invited to meet Colonel Harden, leader of a follow-up expedition that failed locating Voss. Though Laura protests Voss had serious flaws, Hebdén pursues the mystery unsuccessfully for years. Two decades on at the unveiling of Voss's memorial statue, Laura encounters Judd, sole survivor. Though his account contradicts earlier memories, he repeats Voss perished from native spears. Despite Voss's ambition borders on suicidal, Laura concludes he “is there in the country, and always will be,” his quest immortalizing him within the national landscape.

Assignments

1. How does the Australian landscape shape or impact key events and characters in *Voss*?
2. Compare and contrast Voss's expedition party to the later search party of Colonel Hebdén.
3. Analyse the psychic connection depicted between Johann Voss and Laura Trevelyan. How does White use this to explore larger themes?
4. Discuss religion, doubt, or God as symbols in the novel. How do different characters embody contrasting beliefs?

5. Examine whether ambition and self-determination are criticized or celebrated in *Voss*. Use key passages showing your interpretation.
6. Assess Laura Trevelyan and Johann Voss as protagonists. Are they dynamic or static characters? What development occurs?
7. How might *Voss* be interpreted as an allegorical tale about Australia's settler colonial history? Look at themes like conquest versus coexistence with the land.

Suggested Reading

1. Brady, Veronica. "The Novelist and the New World: Patrick White's *Voss*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1979, pp. 169–85. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40754565>.
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3. Bartlett, Norman. "Winds of Change in the Australian Novel." *The Australian Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1960, pp. 75–85. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20633660>.
4. Coad, David. "Patrick White: Prophet in the Wilderness." *World Literature Today*, vol. 67, no. 3, 1993, pp. 510–14. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40149345>.

Reference

1. White, Patrick. *Voss*. United Kingdom, Random House, 2011.
2. Colmer, John. *Patrick White*. United Kingdom, Taylor & Francis, 2019.
3. White, Patrick. *Patrick White Speaks*. United Kingdom, Random House, 2011.
4. Pierce, Peter. *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*. United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2009.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

Critical Responses

BLOCK-04

Block Content

This is a set of critical responses to text in Blocks 2 and 3. These are to be used as critical tools for the analysis of primary texts.

Unit 1 Canadian and Australian Identity in Poetry

Unit 2 Discourses in Canadian and Australian Prose Literatures

Unit 1

Canadian and Australian Identity in Poetry

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ analyse poems challenging stereotypes of Canadian and Australian identity.
- ▶ compare depictions of landscape and environment across texts.
- ▶ examine how poetic form relates to thematic dissent against mainstream stereotyping and marginalisation
- ▶ relate symbolism to social commentary.

Background

This unit looks at a diverse selection of important Canadian and Australian poems about national identity and cultural development in relation to nature. These lyric poems challenge stereotypes through skilful poetic techniques. Creative perspectives that disagree with mainstream views affirm Indigenous worldviews that critique colonial mindsets.

Poetic descriptions of nature present alternative ethics about taking care of the land through reciprocity, not exploitation. Through changes in tone using irony, these counter-narrative poems highlight the limitations of narrow mainstream views inherited from former colonial powers. The eloquent poetic expression accesses profound depths in an imaginative form, capturing tensions in developing national identity.

The assignments allow students to relate the symbolism and imagery in the poems to broader social commentary while examining how the literary form expresses dissent aesthetically. Comparing Indigenous and settler poets highlights contrasting connections between environment and belonging. Through this unit, the learners can interpret layered meanings in compact poetic language. Experiencing powerful themes helps us appreciate the literary growth of Australia and Canada.

Keywords

Dissent, environment, First Nations, identity, irony, landscape, lyricism, mythology, nationalism, oral tradition

Discussion

4.1.1 Poem 1: “Song of the Great Spirit”- First Nations Blackfoot

The “Song of the Great Spirit” prayer composed by Chief Yellow Lark offers profound insight into the worldview, values and spiritual beliefs underpinning Blackfoot First Nations culture. As a seminal embodiment of Indigenous orature traditions that endure into contemporary Canadian literature, analysis of this poem illuminates the sophistication of cultural perspectives often diminished within Canada’s Eurocentric canon. The prayer conveys themes of seeking wisdom, living virtuously, appreciating mortality’s fragility, and harmonising with nature that diverge from mainstream individualism to ground an interdependent community ethic, centred on environmental reciprocity. Through a nuanced examination of its poetic devices, structure and pivotal motifs, the vivid aesthetic and thematic potency of this prayer as a dissenting counter-narrative to colonial hegemony becomes apparent.

► Insight on Blackfoot culture

4.1.1.1 Nature as Sacred Channel

Fundamentally, the Prayer manifests the ubiquity of nature within the Blackfoot conception of the sacred, depicting the natural landscape as the paramount channel for accessing spiritual insight. The wind, leaves, rocks, and sunset are imbued with divine resonance, embodying the Great Spirit’s essence and channelling its teachings. The petition to “walk in beauty” and behold the sunset’s splendour conveys the equation of aesthetic wonder in nature with proximity to the supernatural dimension. Beauty signifies both spiritual grace and the valorisation of the environment itself as a self-contained ethical end rather than a resource for exploitation. This sacralisation of unspoiled nature critiques Canadian governmental policies of aggressive land encroachment and commodification of animal life that violate Blackfoot principles of ecological conservation and sustainability. The

► Nature’s sanctity



importance given to nature in these poems subtly but strongly challenges colonial mindsets. Colonial mindsets viewed Indigenous lands as unoccupied wilderness ready to be taken over. Giving nature a central role in the poems subverts or undermines these colonial attitudes.

4.1.1.2 Ancestral Wisdom

Additionally, the description of nature as instructive, containing “lessons...in every leaf and rock”, challenges stereotypes that see Indigenous knowledge as simple primitive wisdom. Instead, it upholds the sophistication of ancestral environmental awareness passed down over generations. The desire to learn from these lessons challenges the assumption that settlers have superior expertise. This strong environmental ethic questions the greedy depletion of resources that underpin Canada’s national prosperity. In this way, the prayer operates as a form of dissent, affirming Blackfoot spirituality and challenging the destruction of the environment by colonists.

▶ Indigenous wisdom

4.1.1.3 Wind Imagery

The frequent use of wind as a metaphor for the invisible Great Spirit challenges negative colonial views of Indigenous spiritual beliefs as crude and lacking coherence. Instead, the prayer expresses a nuanced spiritual understanding, with wind symbolizing divine power flowing through nature in an invisible, all-encompassing way. This depiction of a subtle, abstract divine presence that goes beyond physical forms shares some similarities with Christian beliefs in one God - slyly challenging the assumption that Indigenous religions were primitive, which was used to justify forcing missionary conversions. The wind imagery quietly dissents against the marginalization of First Nations’ spirituality through poetry.

▶ Spirituality

4.1.1.4 Oral Tradition

Regarding literary dimensions, the prayer’s conventional structure, melodious rhetoric and skilfully executed metaphors showcase Blackfoot oral traditions attaining levels of eloquence rivalling Euro-Canadian poetics. The repeated urgent calling out “Hear me!” creates a driving forward momentum characteristic of ceremonial Blackfoot oratory. This forceful petitioning for revelation signals that the Great Spirit is present within Blackfoot spiritual beliefs.

▶ Tradition and belief

Meanwhile, standardized features from the Gaelic language like stylized opening phrases show conformity to the aesthetics

- ▶ Lyrical coherence and creativity

- ▶ Temporal perspective

- ▶ Balance with nature's cycles

- ▶ Against selfishness

- ▶ Interconnectedness

of an ancient oral culture - "Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds...I come to you as one of your many children." Parallel phrasing enhances the lyrical coherence, with the repeated use of "Make me" at the start of each new stanza binding it to preceding themes through insistent repetition, reminiscent of Biblical psalms. This creates a sense that wisdom flows between generations through shared phrases and motifs, transcending the boundaries of time. In this way, the form of the poem reflects its thematic content.

4.1.1.5 Cyclical Time Metaphors

The metaphor comparing life to a sunset, with images of time passing in cycles, shows both literary sophistication and a distinct worldview from linear modern ideas of time as finite. The prayer's tragic view of human existence as temporary through the fading sunset that "ends" earthly life critiques Euro-Canadian values of stopping decay through scientific progress.

Yet, emphasizing continuity with ancestral knowledge also resists modernity's obsession with novelty. Through its poetic style, the prayer subtly upholds Blackfoot perspectives of balance with nature's eternal cycles. It incorporates both permanence through community memory and impermanence through mortality. This interweaving of continuity and change adapts gracefully to the traumatic disruption caused by colonial modernity.

4.1.1.6 Interconnection with Community

Finally, the prayer's overall priority of attaining harmony with the external natural world and one's internal nature codifies a central principle of Blackfoot ethics that distinguishes it from European individualism. The desire for wisdom, virtue, self-knowledge and restraining destructive impulses conveys the belief that spiritual enlightenment comes from conquering selfish excess rather than cultivating individual empowerment. Hence the "greatest enemy" is not outside forces of oppression but oneself. This contrasts with Euro-American models where unfettered personal liberty enables self-actualization.

Instead, Blackfoot's spiritual beliefs posit that contentment can be found only through recognizing one's interconnectedness within the communal whole of people and the landscape. Thus, the prayer eloquently affirms a worldview that dissents from dominant perspectives, grounding shared prosperity in humility and reciprocity rather than promoting self-interest.



4.1.2 Poem 2: “Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never be Written”- Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood’s minimalist yet hard-hitting poem “Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never be Written” examines the paradoxical power and inadequacy of language to communicate traumatic human experiences. While denying that any art can encapsulate certain violent realities like torture and genocide, Atwood simultaneously argues for the moral necessity of the imperfect attempt. For those living under repressive regimes, writing truth itself represents an act of courageous resistance, even if it leads directly towards death. Hence “Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written” explores poetry’s imperative to bear witness despite the ultimately futile quest to capture unimaginable suffering in aesthetic form.

- ▶ Inadequacy of language

4.1.2.1 Fragmented Structure

Atwood’s poem mirrors its core message through its fragmented structure. The six separate numbered sections underline the big gaps in understanding when confronting atrocity. The broken stanzas connected by blank spaces resemble pieces of a puzzle that can never be fully completed. This refusal of a fluid narrative reinforces how trauma shatters continuity in victims’ lives. The gaps signal all that is left out and unable to be expressed. In this way, the poem’s structure aesthetically shows the limitations of language itself.

- ▶ Structural interpretation

4.1.2.2 Word Choices

Within its fragmented verses, Atwood uses extremely concise and direct word choices that reject poetic embellishments, acknowledging that poetic eloquence is insufficient for representing horrific human actions. Her use of blunt statements like “This is famine” conveys an almost reportorial refusal of ornamentation. Yet vivid details puncture these pared-down lines: “the sandpits/where so many were buried.” This harsh clarity provides touchpoints for glimpsing the scope of brutality, even though not fully picturing its depth.

- ▶ Refusal of ornamentation

4.1.2.3 Second-Person Voice

Atwood uses the technique of addressing the reader directly (“you”) to prevent the reader from emotionally distancing themselves from uncomfortable realities. When she writes “This is the place/that will finally defeat you”, she anticipates

- ▶ To emotionally connect the reader

- ▶ Confronting harsh realities

- ▶ Voice for the marginalised

- ▶ Artistic rebellion

that the reader will likely try to avoid truly understanding the immense suffering she is describing, which is beyond full comprehension. By declaring that the possibility of comprehension is impossible, she contrasts it with how urgently comprehension must still be pursued.

The strange and unsettling lines like “the razor across the eyeball/is a truth” break the expectations of what poetry should be, shocking the reader out of a feeling of complacency in the safe emotional space that art usually provides. Lines like this make the reader confront harsh realities head-on, rather than retreating into the comfort and beauty often associated with poetic artistry.

4.1.2.4 Attempts to Overcome Limits

Atwood suggests that trying to express unspeakable truths, even though we may not fully succeed, is morally important. Struggling with the limitations of language reflects the limits of our understanding and empathy. These unsuccessful attempts highlight the gap between what’s real and what’s just, bringing us closer to those who are silenced and resisting their erasure. In societies where free speech is valued, Atwood believes there’s a responsibility to amplify the voices of those who are marginalised. Those in influential positions have a significant duty to bear witness. Atwood uses vivid imagery to counter any complacency towards violations of rights.

She sees poetry as a moral obligation to convey painful truths, even when words fall short. The very act of trying honours humanity and prevents violations from having the last say. Pushing the boundaries of art can ignite a moral awakening. In this way, Atwood pays homage to rebellious poets under totalitarian regimes, whose defiance fights against being erased, even in death. Acknowledging our limitations makes room for poetic forms to emerge, from the initial witnessing to eventual justice. Atwood suggests that in societies where free speech only reinforces existing power dynamics, it loses its purpose. Challenging the status quo forces us to confront uncomfortable truths. Poetry reveals the harsh realities hidden beneath the veneer of civility, which oppressors may justify as necessary.

4.1.2.5 Responsibility to Strengthen Voices

Certainly, Atwood highlights a stark difference between the apathy in “this country,” where “no one listens” despite an abundance of expression, and the bravery “elsewhere”

- ▶ Against injustice and brutality

- ▶ Art as responsible tool

- ▶ Resilience in verse

- ▶ Disruptive truths

where “the poets are already dead.” She suggests that those who can speak their truths without facing life-threatening consequences have a responsibility to do so for those who are violently silenced. While it’s a challenging task, the writer must witness injustice with empathy and without looking away. According to Atwood, this involves using vivid wound imagery to jolt readers out of complacency and remove their blinkers to the brutality of humanity.

4.1.2.6 The Duty to Tell the Untellable

In the end, Atwood sees the poetic project as a moral responsibility to keep trying to express difficult political truths, even when it feels like figurative language may fall short. Although it’s never a perfect translation, the very act of trying respects the humanity hidden in numbers and stops violation from having the last say. By showing the limits of art, artistic efforts to convey the unspeakable can act as a reference to truth and a pathway to moral awakening.

4.1.2.7 Thematic Critique

Atwood admirably acknowledges the bravery of poets in oppressive regimes, where mass graves symbolize the potential consequences of political dissent. According to her, even in death, creativity fights against being forgotten. She suggests that poetry, though facing challenges, carves out markers of human identity against the tide of dehumanization. The repeated phrase “nothing works” highlights the limitations of traditional elegies and statistical data in capturing traumatic experiences. Atwood proposes that acknowledging these limitations opens up space for more suitable forms of expression. Witness poetry holds onto the pain until justice poetry can bring about healing.

Atwood points out the irony of the abundance but ineffectiveness of free speech “in this country where no one listens.” She contrasts this with the courage found in poetry that challenges those in power, suggesting that words serve a purpose when they disrupt ideological comfort and compel confrontation with harsh realities. Atwood sheds light on the harsh violence beneath seemingly civilized societies. Euphemisms like “concerto” reveal how oppressors clinically justify cruel acts as routine necessities. In this way, poetry exposes the brutality lurking in ordered communities, especially under totalitarianism.

4.1.2.8 Motifs

Violent Unearthing

The details of “eyeball/razor” symbolize breaking painful taboos as ways to reveal hidden truths. Violence is used to expose the darker aspects of reality, revealing the barbarity thriving beneath the surface of civilization. Poetry acts like pocket flashlights, shining light on what is obscured.

► Revealing Darkness

Bodies Echoing Stories

The image of a deceased woman “writing this poem” with her “silent and fingerless” hands represents bodies silenced by political violence, serving as conduits for truth-telling. Atwood suggests that poets must speak through death to rescue stories that are still alive.

► Silenced bodies

Geography and Moral Disconnect

The unspecified “elsewhere,” depicting oppression abroad, highlights the consequence-free nature of dissent “in this country.” Atwood closes this moral gap by connecting free listeners with unfree voices, emphasizing humanity’s shared vulnerability to violence.

► Global solidarity

In Margaret Atwood’s thought-provoking poem, trauma becomes both an archaeological dig and a call to action. She digs beneath the surface of everyday life to uncover hidden, savage currents that persist despite being covered in concrete. However, she also warns that forgetting aids the darkness thriving in the forgotten crevices below. Atwood uses the inherently limited tools of vocabulary and metaphor to illuminate forbidden zones that are kept from view. Though her stanzas are fragmented, they expose the wholeness of humanity routinely disrupted by regimes that separate stories from bodies. By guiding readers to realms that defy understanding, Atwood takes us to the border between what can be conceived and what cannot. She leaves us at the crossing, urging us to carry even the uncarryable across the frontier of apathy. For that silenced mid-sentence, continuing the narrative honours fragmented journeys toward truth. In a world where silence can mean surrender, the imperfect melody of witness poetry sustains hope.

► Trauma

4.1.3 Poem 3: “Australia”- A. D. Hope

4.1.3.1 The Barren Landscape of “Australia”

A.D. Hope’s famous satirical poem uses the Australian



► Cultural critique

landscape to highlight the country's perceived cultural and intellectual shortcomings. He paints a vivid picture of the natural environment as aged, eroded, and sterile, sharply criticizing Australia for lacking in artistic heritage and philosophical tradition compared to older civilizations elsewhere. However, Hope's depiction of the expansive desert also suggests a potential source for visionary art and literature to emerge if Australian creators are willing to explore the extremes of their environment.

4.1.3.2 Anti-Intellectualism and Insular Nationalism

Hope captures the main conflicts surrounding Australian cultural identity in the mid-20th century through the sharp wit of "Australia." He mocks the aggressive Aussie nationalism and anti-intellectual bush mythology of the time, portraying them as narrow constraints that hinder broader contributions to global ideas and culture. Through irony and mimicked dialect, Hope ridicules the stereotypical image of the laconic bushman as an outdated tribal elder. He insists it's high time for Australian literature to move beyond such limited tropes and develop a more sophisticated, internationally resonant poetic voice that speaks with wisdom and nuance instead of merely boasting about provincial matters.

► Cultural satire

4.1.3.3 Urban Dependency

Alongside his critique of the wilderness's lack of artistic vitality, Hope also portrays the five major Australian coastal cities as dependent parasites feeding off European values. Lacking a genuine cultural centre, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth are depicted as clinging to the edges of an alien landscape without engaging with it imaginatively. Hope's vivid maternal metaphor paints the urban population as having a "womb within dry," unable to conceive truly original art and thought. This sense of cultural detachment from the environment and the failure to establish a connection between the interior and exterior worlds reflect the deeper uncertainties Australians felt about their relationship to the land and colonial foundations during this era.

► City spaces

4.1.3.4 Critique of Cultural Cringe

Certainly, "Australia" is part of Hope's broader commentary on the Australian 'cultural cringe' - the tendency he noticed in local arts to display derivative qualities and lack confidence, sophistication, or vitality compared to British or

▶ Local arts

American output. Through his poetry, scholarship, and work editing literary journals, Hope actively criticized shallow talent and provincial tendencies in Australian writing, urging for the development of truly pioneering voices. “Australia” reflects his impatience for the nation to better connect with its landscape and indigenous experience at a high creative level that resonates with international audiences rather than just a local audience.

▶ Identity tensions

4.1.3.5 Nationalism versus Internationalism

In this context, “Australia” sheds light on the country’s identity politics during the post-war period, torn between conservative isolationism and progressive internationalism. As Robert Menzies continued Australia’s close ties with Britain, radicals advocated for greater self-reliance and engagement with Asia. Hope mocks the stereotypical Aussie bush persona while also evoking epic potency in the desert landscape. His poem informs global readers about enduring tensions within Australian self-perception.

▶ Need for potential

4.1.3.6 Redemption from the Desert?

Critically, while Hope criticizes the cultural sterility of both the bush and the city, he provocatively suggests that the harsh environment equally offers potential for visionary Australian art. Beyond the busy coastal areas where most people live, Hope sees a spark in the empty desert heartland. Away from the rigid cultural history and industries of older continents, places like Pilbara and the Red Centre could be special grounds for bold ideas to rejuvenate society. Just like ancient Jewish mystics got insight in the barren wilderness and Spartan warriors got strong under the hot sun, Australian artists and thinkers might discover strengths not weakened but strengthened by the challenges of their environment, if they’re ready to explore its harsh quietness and extremes to find hidden inspiration.

4.1.3.7 Patriotism and Satire

While Hope’s poem may come across as sharply critical of Australian culture in the mid-20th century, there’s an underlying fondness for the country’s potential. He shows this through references to classical ideas and a romantic appreciation for the vastness of the landscape. As an intellectual, Hope is understandably frustrated with what he sees as anti-intellectual attitudes among the people. However, his writing style favours clever metaphors and scholarly

► The frustrated Hope

references over simple language, indicating support for the search for a uniquely Australian way of expression. Beyond the surface criticism, the poem also acknowledges and celebrates Australia's distinctiveness from older cultures. It genuinely calls for the recognition of the country's merits through achievements in literature and contributions on the global stage.

► Poetic craftsmanship

4.1.3.8 Analysis of the Poem

"Australia" showcases Hope's skilful poetry with its organized structure, repeating themes, and versatile tone. In the beginning, the image of darkening trees and hills introduces the idea of a barren environment, using military erosion and sphinx comparisons to portray the poem's main focus as a civilization past its prime. Despite the starkness, Hope's choice of words flows smoothly.

► Metaphorical critique

In the second stanza, Australia is metaphorically portrayed as a post-menopausal woman, using fertile maternal imagery ironically to suggest decay. Clever slant rhymes like "dry/lie" make the argument more concise, and rhythmic three-beat lines echo a sense of impotency. The mention of the nation's "immense stupidity" flooding citizens criticizes anti-intellectual tendencies, suggesting that Australia needs to mature intellectually alongside the elderly female figure.

► Redemption in the desert

The comparison between the desert and the city suggests the failure of both landscapes – the scrubland only supports hardy survival without cultural richness, while talentless cities imitate Europe. Yet the desert offers potential redemption. By escaping the pretentious "civilisation" for the mind's "Arabian desert," artists might find primal inspiration similar to the prophets of ancient times.

► Satirical tone

The fourth stanza uses an abrasive Aussie dialect to mock narrow bush mythology. Sardonic mimicry satirizes aggressive nationalism and anti-intellectual parochialism. Contrasting this ocker voice (an Australian accent in a rough and uncultivated manner) with the cultured talk of "cultured apes" sharpens Hope's criticism through ironic contrast.

► Hopeful regeneration

The sparse final stanza promises "some spirit which escapes" the sterility of modernity. If engaged imaginatively, Australia's ancient landscapes could nurture globally relevant art. Despite its severity, Hope expresses faith in the landscape's ability to creatively regenerate. Alliteration, repeated structures, and animistic metaphors add poetic flair

to the potential of the desert.

4.1.3.9 Relevance of “Australia” to A.D. Hope’s Composition

“Australia” reflects A.D. Hope’s distinctive poetic style, known for its ironic wit, flawless rhythm, and precise language. His organized stanza structure and clever use of language make complex ideas seem simple on the surface. By selectively describing the environment, Hope creates a sense of grand scale and contrasts it with smaller cultural details. This technical brilliance, combined with sardonic humour, makes “Australia” a prime example of Hope’s ambitious commentary on mid-century society.

► Poetic mastery

In a broader context, Hope’s varied career consistently includes open criticism of the ‘cultural cringe’ in Australian arts. He believed that anti-intellectual or imitative qualities hindered the development of a confident and sophisticated local style. Through poetry and other channels like academic writing, journalism, and editing literary journals, Hope actively promoted talented writing that went beyond shallow expectations. “Australia,” one of his most popular works, encapsulates Hope’s impatience for the nation to better connect with its landscape and Aboriginal heritage, contributing to global ideas instead of sticking to provincial ways.

► Cultural renaissance

Widely included in Australian poetry collections, “Australia” reflects Hope’s mixed feelings about Australia’s changes during the post-war era. It captures the country’s move from colonial ties to finding its own cultural identity. Initially well-received, the poem earned Hope the Grace Leven Prize for Poetry, establishing him as a leading literary figure. Its strong themes also influenced later novelists like Patrick White, who aimed to deepen Australians’ understanding of themselves through fiction in the following decades. The lasting appeal of “Australia” lies in how it expresses Hope’s desire for a diverse environment to inspire a unique poetic style, blending wit, depth, and a global perspective with indigenous traditions. For today’s students and poets, Hope’s example as a humanist continues to be inspiring.

► Impact and legacy

4.1.3.10 Hope’s “Australia” vs Paterson’s “Clancy of the Overflow”

While the Australian Bush poet A.B. Banjo Paterson’s 1889 poem “Clancy of the Overflow” warmly romanticizes



► Contrasting perspectives

the iconic Aussie bushman roaming the isolated plains under the stars, A.D. Hope's 1961 poem "Australia" aims to challenge the nationalist myth of the Outback culture. Paterson nostalgically praises the herder Clancy for enjoying freedom in the countryside, contrasting it with his own mundane office life in town. However, Hope satirizes the idealized bush lifestyle as limited in its narrow horizons, incapable of producing sophisticated cultural output for a mature nation. He humorously imitates the Outback dialect to point out its stuck-in-adolescence attitude, highlighting its lack of profound wisdom to enhance Australian literature.

► Dual perspectives on the Australian spirit

Despite their differences in subject and tone, both poems reflect ambivalent patriotism toward Australian identity and environment in unique ways. While Paterson nostalgically admires freedom and humour, investing in the mythic figure of Clancy as a symbol of redeeming Australian traits, he also acknowledges the hardships of bush life. Similarly, despite Hope's critical view of mid-century artistic culture, he secretly appreciates the rebellious poetry he believes could emerge from Australia's desert roots with proper care. Each poet skillfully captures the creative tension between civilization and wilderness, portraying the Australian spirit swinging back and forth between settlement and the hinterland.

► Complementary perspectives

So, even though initially reading Paterson's Clancy helped popularise the stoic Bushman image that Hope later seems to enjoy dismantling in his scornful satire, the two works actually share common ground on the topic of national identity. Bridging the gaps in the vast Australian landscape has always involved balancing the environment's toughness and human comfort. By offering different views of this fundamental duality deeply ingrained in the regional experience, these significant works show how Australia's cultural maturity has developed over generations, creating layered perspectives from the same foundation.

► Evolution

Today, we can appreciate both Clancy and "Australia" as complementary portraits that enhance our understanding of how Australia saw itself evolve in the early 20th century, considering the challenges and opportunities presented by its landscape. In fact, the nation's literary identity keeps evolving through the thoughtful creative tension between artistic visions interpreting what their unique environment means for global contribution.

4.1.4 Poem 4: “The Year of the Foxes” - David Malouf

Malouf’s poem “The Year of the Foxes” explores complex themes surrounding Australia’s cultural identity after World War II. The presence of fox furs in a family home serves as a symbol of the country’s loss of innocence, subtly addressing societal shifts in the 1950s, such as increasing materialism and American influence. The detailed descriptions of the fox furs create a weird atmosphere in the house, with their lifelike body parts giving them a ghostly presence that seems to watch over the people, creating a menacing feeling. The foxes repeatedly appear like haunting ghosts, and the child speaker imagines hearing their cries at night, reminiscent of haunted elements in other Australian gothic literary works.

► Symbolism and menace

Malouf references the enduring trauma and grief within Australian society post-World War II. The women buying the fox furs, despite their glamorous outfits, carry the scars of war, suggesting they are hiding their sadness and personal losses behind a fashionable exterior. As American pop culture influences Australia, people use this glitz and glamour to mask their underlying trauma.

► War’s impact

The child speaker in the poem symbolizes the loss of innocence when the adult world’s business side enters his home. The trade of fox furs represents nature being seen only for its monetary value and human use. The imagined sounds of dogs hunting foxes fade away, depicting animals turning into commercial goods. Malouf uses this symbol to show how Australia is transitioning into a modern era focused on materialism rather than appreciating nature. Malouf compares living foxes in the wild to dead foxes turned into household items. Placing the fur coats on chairs contrasts their natural essence with the artificial domestic setting, suggesting that exploiting nature may have unseen consequences. This ties into a common theme in Australian literature about people grappling with the environment.

► Loss of innocence

Ultimately, the women wearing fox fur coats from America highlight Australia’s loss of innocence after the war, shifting towards consumerism and being influenced by America rather than holding onto traditional values. Through these thought-provoking connections between imagery, Malouf encourages reflection on this crucial period in Australia’s development.

► Cultural shifts



- ▶ Malouf's global appeal

- ▶ A typical Malouf-poem

- ▶ Stylistic contrasts

- ▶ Contrasting craftsmanship

4.1.4.1 Key Themes

Similar to acclaimed authors Patrick White and Peter Carey, David Malouf enjoys international popularity while focusing on uniquely Australian themes. His poetic prose explores Australia's colonial history, the connections between past and present eras, the unexpected surprises of the natural landscape, and the moral significance found in personal relationships.

In this context, "The Year of the Foxes" aligns with Malouf's broader body of work. The fox furs could serve as a symbol for humanity's moral imperfections, while the loss of childhood reflects the transitions between history and modernity. The mood created in the poem mirrors Malouf's characteristic style of blending ordinary details with a touch of the strangeness. Malouf's ability to identify historical turning points clarifies why his work remains relevant. This poem captures Australia on the point of postwar recovery, with the emergence of American glamour and consumerism prevalent in 1950s literature. Like poet Judith Wright, Malouf skillfully captures subtle shifts in perspective through the symbolism of the landscape.

4.1.4.2 Malouf's and Murray's Contrasting Poetic Styles

Although both are esteemed as major Australian poets, Malouf and Murray offer distinctly different literary visions of Australia through their unique writing styles. Malouf crafts philosophical depth using sparse, intricate poems, distilling small and precise scenes that reflect on meaningful moments. In contrast, Murray utilises dynamic and densely packed lines, continuously weaving inventive imagery. He navigates through surreal landscapes, seamlessly blending oversized characters with their environments.

Malouf's approach is akin to that of a meticulous jeweller, carefully examining and crafting each moment. On the other hand, Murray can be likened to a powerful dynamo, releasing a burst of adjectives that vividly describe the land and its creatures. Despite their divergent styles, both poets share a profound passion for the Australian landscape, bringing it to life through the beauty of language. Malouf suggests hidden connections within moments, while Murray unleashes a vivid catalogue of adjectives that describe the land and its creatures.

Their differing styles also exchange optimistic and sober tones. Malouf's harmonies can take on a darker manner, while

- ▶ Both depict diverse atmosphere

- ▶ Role of suburban gothic

- ▶ Magical realism

- ▶ Existential uncertainty

- ▶ Exploration of suburban gothic

Murray's liveliness can cast shadows. Yet, together, they skillfully capture Australia's diverse atmosphere through their technical mastery. The combination of their poetry contributes to the rich conception of national identity.

4.1.4.3 The Use of Suburban Gothic in Australian Literature

David Malouf's disturbing poem follows the Australian literary tradition of introducing gothic unease into familiar suburban life, a concept known as "suburban gothic." By subverting ordinary home life, the Australian authors aim to examine the reliability of society. Joan Lindsay's 1967 novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* influenced numerous works with its theme of missing schoolgirls and distorted time, merging ghostly visions with the Australian landscape and European gothic. This acknowledgement of Australia's unique environment became a prominent feature.

Joan Lindsay's iconic 1970s film adaptation inspired imaginative and magical realism grounded in suburbia. Authors such as Kate Grenville and Tim Winton explore unpredictable story worlds that intersect with everyday life. Similarly, Malouf introduces an uncanny atmosphere by portraying animals removed from their natural habitat. The dead foxes represent echoes of colonized territory, with their cries acting as warnings. The animistic tones that blur the lines between animals and humans disrupt the familiar literary setting.

Australian suburban gothic makes everyday suburban life feel uncertain, making us question how reliable our normal lives really are. The glimpses of instability might reflect worries about Australia's history and its complex relationship with the land. While European gothic often deals with curses from the past, the Australian version is more about the challenging and unfamiliar landscape, exploring the sense of displacement in Aussie society.

Writers are still drawn to disrupt the sense of security in suburban life, exploring Australian society, identity, and the environment. Mixing gritty realism with fantasy implies that there's still a sense of magic beneath the surface. Suburban gothic acts as a metaphor, allowing for insightful cultural commentary. Malouf, for instance, shows how to extract deeper meaning from haunting images.



Summarised Overview

This unit looks at important Canadian and Australian poems that challenge common stereotypes about national identity. The poems use creative writing techniques like symbolism, imagery, and irony to show different views that disagree with mainstream colonial ideas. By focusing on nature and the environment, the poems support Indigenous perspectives that criticize how the land was taken and used by colonial powers. The poems spiritually describe nature, showing it should be respected and cared for, not just used for resources. Through changes in tone and style, these poems point out the limits of narrow nationalistic thinking. The poems capture tensions in developing Canadian and Australian cultural identities creatively. Comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous poets shows different connections to the landscape.

Assignments

1. How do the selected poems use nature and the environment as symbols to challenge stereotypes and mainstream perceptions of Canadian and Australian identity?
2. In what ways do the poems by Indigenous poets, such as the “Song of the Great Spirit,” assert alternative worldviews and dissent against colonial attitudes toward the land and spirituality?
3. Discuss the role of irony, fragmentation, and direct language in Margaret Atwood’s “Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never be Written” in conveying the limitations and necessity of bearing witness to traumatic human experiences.
4. Analyze the use of satirical voice and contrasting imagery in A.D. Hope’s “Australia” to critique the narrow nationalism and anti-intellectualism of mid-20th century Australian culture.
5. How does David Malouf’s “The Year of the Foxes” use the symbolism of fox furs to explore themes of loss of innocence, materialism, and the influence of American culture in post-World War II Australia?
6. Compare and contrast the poetic styles of David Malouf and Les Murray, and discuss how their different approaches contribute to the diverse portrayal of the Australian landscape and national identity.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

Unit 2

Discourses in Canadian and Australian Prose Literatures

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ understand how Sharon Pollock's play critiques racism in Canada's past
- ▶ explain Jack Davis' drama spotlighting Australia's oppression of Aboriginal peoples
- ▶ discuss how Gabrielle Roy's memoir explores her development as an author
- ▶ analyse key themes related to landscape and ambition in Patrick White's novel *Voss*

Background

This unit looks at Canadian and Australian literature dealing with identity and injustice. Sharon Pollock was a leading Canadian playwright. Her drama *The Komagata Maru Incident* tells the true story of a 1914 event when Canada denied entry to a ship of immigrants from India. It confronts Canada's history of prejudice. Australian writer Jack Davis protested racism against Aboriginal people in his play *No Sugar*. It shows a family suffering under government assimilation policies that tried to eliminate native culture. Canadian author Gabrielle Roy wrote the memoir *Enchantment and Sorrow* about becoming a writer. It delineates not only her happy childhood but also her troubles as a teacher that shaped her books later on. *Voss* is an iconic Australian novel by Patrick White. It follows an explorer crossing the deadly Australian desert. Themes look at landscape, racism, and ambition.

Keywords

Racism, Aboriginal peoples, memoir, exploration, landscape, identity, injustice



4.2.1 *The Komagata Maru Incident* - Sharon Pollock

In her groundbreaking 1976 play “The Komagata Maru Incident”, seminal Canadian playwright Sharon Pollock unleashed her full artistic powers to spotlight a disturbing episode of racism buried in the nation’s past. This one-act docudrama takes as inspiration actual 1914 events when the steamship Komagata Maru arrived in Vancouver carrying 376 British Indian subjects seeking refuge, only to face two months of cruel confinement before a violent denouement forced their exit. Canada’s racist exclusionary policies had conspired to bar these South Asian immigrants’ entry. Pollock’s theatrical treatment of this historical tragedy forms a compelling act of remembrance and moral reckoning.

► A dark chapter

4.2.1.1 Fictionalising Racist Realities

While Pollock largely followed the factual details, he employed artistic license to create an imaginative dramatization using Brechtian techniques. The atmosphere takes on a circus-like quality, with an enigmatic white-suited Master of Ceremonies directly addressing the audience to propel the action forward. Serving as a spokesperson for the court of public opinion and manipulative governmental forces, he orchestrates the Komagata Maru’s rejection through legalized racism. This imaginative framing device emphasizes the responsibility of state authorities for causing the passengers’ trauma. The dialogue thoughtfully investigates how colonial and white supremacist notions profoundly shaped social systems and national identity.

► Artistic license and techniques

4.2.1.2 William Hopkinson, the Protagonist

At the core of the narrative is the fictionalized protagonist William Hopkinson, an immigration inspector based on the actual historical figure involved in the politically charged standoff. Hopkinson is portrayed as a tragic figure torn by his half-British, half-Sikh heritage. Despite having deep doubts, Hopkinson strongly enforces racist policies. His mixed heritage adds complexity, making the audience feel collectively responsible. Hopkinson’s lover, Evy, acts as his conscience, questioning his involvement. Their tense

► Character complexity

interactions bring emotional depth, reflecting the widespread uncertainty in the national psyche.

4.2.1.3 Giving Voice to the Oppressed

The play's moral impact lies in the East Asian Woman immigrant vividly expressing the traumatic confinement of the Komagata Maru passengers on their ship. Her passionate cries, ranging from desperate appeals to defiant anger at the dehumanizing mistreatment, offer a sharp dissent, revealing the human stories obscured behind the headlines. The play deliberately ends by recognizing the impact on each silenced life. Focusing on marginalized voices, it compels acknowledgement of minority perspectives often excluded from nationalist narratives.

► Marginalized voices

4.2.1.4 Artistic Dissent and Ethical Awakening

With vivid theatricality and immigrant characters challenging historical records, Pollock sparks dissent by revealing the contradictions in national myths of generosity. Her dramatic accusation prompts audiences to question current systemic inequities rooted in imperialistic colonial pasts and racial treatment. Elevating marginalized voices and their resistance is crucial for inspiring positive change. Works like *The Komagata Maru Incident*, with their powerful catharsis, awaken our collective morality by shedding light on inconvenient truths.

► Change through dissent

4.2.2 No Sugar - Jack Davis

Jack Davis' acclaimed protest drama *No Sugar* (1985) offers a window into the oppression of Aboriginal Australians under 20th-century racist legislation and assimilation policies. Set in 1920's Western Australia between the regional township of Northam and the infamous Moore River Native Settlement, the play graphically dramatizes dehumanizing injustices and human rights violations inflicted upon the Millimurra family at the hands of self-righteous white authorities. Davis skillfully mixes heartbreaking tragedy with the enduring strength of Aboriginal culture, despite facing unimaginable generational trauma at the hands of "Protectors" more focused on politics than ethics or justice.

► Injustices faced by aboriginals

4.2.2.1 Systemic Racism

In the play, A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector, represents the bureaucratic system aiming to erase First Nations identity. Along with his collaborators and white caricatures,



► Institutional racism

Neville's speeches dehumanize Aboriginals, portraying them as obstacles to progress without basic human rights. Davis highlights the twisted justifications behind violent practices like family dislocations and child abductions as necessary state interventions. Neville's speeches reveal how prejudice becomes ingrained in institutional thinking. Without remorse, he orders the "clean-up" of Northam's fringe dwellers, showing an indifference that mirrors executioners rather than statesmen. Davis suggests Australia's claims to liberal democracy were built on prioritizing political expediency over moral obligation, exposing a history of racial torment.

4.2.2.2 Aboriginal Dignity and Resilience

► Resilience of Aboriginal culture

Davis discusses unfair treatment and the resilience of Aboriginal culture despite attempts to erase it. Gran, a family leader, fosters pride despite challenges, emphasizing the significance of storytelling. Despite attacks on sacred language and self-governance, connections between generations persist. Joe whispers vows in a forbidden tongue, and Mary takes risks to give birth to Jimmy, preserving cultural heritage. Davis is expressing the idea that the cultural heritage of First Nations, which includes their traditions, stories, and way of life, cannot be eliminated. Despite deliberate efforts to disrupt it through actions like segregation, environmental pollution, or the construction of dams, the enduring strength of the ancestral spirit remains steadfast.

4.2.2.3 Broken Spirits and Lost Voices

► Impact of assimilation policies

Through the character of Jimmy Munday, Davis explores how Aboriginal individuals, like Jimmy, suffered from internalizing prejudiced European attitudes prevalent in Australian society. When Jimmy succumbed to the oppressive weight of heartless bureaucratic systems designed to suppress "defiant" spirits, he resorted to drinking and rebelled against unjust systems he felt powerless to change. His loss of agency was evident as he could no longer fulfil the role of a loving uncle, revealing the lasting impact of assimilation policies' abuse.

Even after Jimmy's death, his firm refusal to compromise became a source of strength for his surviving family. Naming the next generation with his forbidden name, Joe and Mary resurrected what authorities had deemed dead. Davis suggests that the hard-fought rights of past sacrifices persist as long as descendants carry a determined sense of justice. For Davis,

► Resistance

► Relevance of *No Sugar*

► Notions of civilization

honouring dissenters labelled as “troublemakers” by history injects vibrant strength into the will of future generations who refuse to endure what their predecessors suffered.

4.2.2.4 Theatre as an Archive of Cultural Trauma

Davis dramatized 20th-century laws that enabled discrimination against ethnic groups and campaigns to destroy Aboriginal culture. He importantly shared Aboriginal perspectives that were usually silenced in mainstream society. Instead of ignoring unresolved atrocities that are now considered inconvenient history better forgotten, Davis emphasized that addressing injustice is impossible if its magnitude and the biases fueling it are concealed or brushed aside with insignificance. Crucially, *No Sugar* remains urgent precisely because the human rights violations and trauma passed down through generations mirror current realities of Aboriginal people being disproportionately imprisoned, dying in custody, and suffering economic impoverishment. This shows how racism evolves but never fully disappears.

By portraying the Millimurra family as affectionate and united, Davis exposes the false justifications used by Neville and his assimilationist allies. Their claims that Aboriginal people were inherently backward, violent, or immoral were contradicted by the loving portrayal of the family. Davis highlights Aboriginal survival wisdom and the harsh punishment for minor “offenses” like smoking pipes. Davis highlights a contrast between the presumed superiority of British standards and sustainable community practices that existed before colonial disruption. Rather than the environmental negligence depicted in *No Sugar*, Davis proposes that true civilization flourishes when persecuted minorities maintain connections to their ancestral bonds. The key is that their resistance, in the face of adversity, serves as inspiration for future generations, empowering them to heal and thrive. In essence, Davis argues that genuine civilization emerges when communities uphold their traditions and resilience, despite external pressures and injustices.

Through powerful yet beautifully expressed plays like *No Sugar*, Davis actively pursued justice by bringing marginalized Aboriginal perspectives to the forefront of Australian cultural awareness. Without downplaying the historical sufferings, Davis contributes to reconciliation by transforming intergenerational pain into a cathartic experience that demands overdue public acknowledgement. *No Sugar* not only raises

► Reconciliation

► Memoir

► Roy's legacy

► Nostalgic enchantment

awareness of historical blindness but also leaves a lasting impression: genuine social healing can only commence when existing systems honestly confront the deep-seated wounds and legacies still affecting a wounded yet resilient land. Davis suggests that acknowledging these uncomfortable truths is essential for mutual understanding to blossom, emphasizing that the waters that once divided can become a source of nourishment for a more harmonious society.

4.2.3 *Enchantment and Sorrow* - Gabrielle Roy

Canadian author Gabrielle Roy's memoir *Enchantment and Sorrow* was published in 1984, one year after she died. It looks back on Roy's early life in Saint Boniface, Manitoba up to age thirty. *Enchantment* tells about the joy and magic of Roy's happy childhood. *Sorrow* is about the troubles and loneliness she felt later as a teacher and young woman. The memoir gives rare glimpses into what most influenced Roy's writing. Its main themes still deeply connect with readers today.

4.2.3.1 Roy Writes Her Own Life Story

Many know Roy for her famous novels about French Canadian life like *The Tin Flute*. She also wrote the memoir *Enchantment and Sorrow* late in her career. The book shows Roy's great skill at describing people and places from her own life. It helps explain what shaped her into a leading Canadian author. As literature professor François Ricard has said, nowhere else does Roy recreate the very feeling of childhood with such intimacy. *Enchantment and Sorrow* transports readers into important memories that inspired Roy's imagination.

4.2.3.2 Main Events in Roy's Early Life

Roy begins *Enchantment* with warm memories of growing up in Saint Boniface's French community. She tenderly describes her large and loving family and their cosy house by the calm Red River. Though they were poor, the Roy children delighted in the beauty of the natural world outside their door. Young Gabrielle felt great inspiration from this special landscape.

When Roy turns seven, she starts school at a strict Catholic academy. Here she discovers reading and writing. She feels immediately amazed by the richness of language in books. She

► Educational yearning

falls in love with authors like Longfellow. This early magical feeling about literature started her lifelong passion for reading and writing. As a teenager, Roy yearns to keep studying, but gender roles at that time shut off choices for ambitious young women. Roy felt deep distress at expectations to soon marry and have children. She longed for education and creative outlets beyond these limits.

► Challenges

Still thirsty to learn, Roy takes a teaching job in a remote country town at age sixteen. The harsh work overwhelms her, leaving her quite alone and doubtful of her abilities. In her twenties, Roy teaches indigenous students in an impoverished village. The discrimination she witnesses there pains her. She feels an exile living amidst other exiles denied justice. Roy writes that these searing experiences as a young teacher expanded her awareness of inequality and suffering. They laid the social insight at the heart of her later fiction. But during her twenties, constant loneliness and lack of belonging still torment her.

► Love of reading and writing

4.2.3.3 Literature and Writing

Two key themes weave through *Enchantment and Sorrow*. One is Roy's intense love of reading and writing starting as a schoolgirl. Books and language fill her with their magic and power of connection. She longs to spark similar wonder and insight about real people's lives in her works.

► Struggles and triumphs

The second main theme is how bias, barriers, and isolation burden creative women like Roy. Poverty and gender duties forced her to quit her studies. Prejudice towards French Canadians and teaching nomadically fostered constant distress. But the memoir's end shows Roy finding her community among Quebec artists. Their encouragement finally helps her speak in her true writer's voice after years of feeling voiceless. Winning acclaim for debut novel *The Tin Flute* brings confidence. Roy transforms early sorrows into the enchantment of hard-won literary success.

4.2.3.4 Roy's Legacy

Though lesser known today than her famous novels like *The Tin Flute*, Roy's memoir holds lasting power. Her words make social constraints facing earlier 20th-century women painfully real. Readers empathize with Roy's desire to create and connect, even when she is restricted by societal rules. We admire her strength which would not be silenced. *Enchantment*

► Roy's quality

► Roy's humanistic fiction

► Rigid wilderness

► Power of nature

and Sorrow also shows how key lonely experiences were for Roy's growth into a legendary writer. Solitude forced self-reckoning and insight even as it haunted her. Transmuting that sorrow brought her joy and purpose.

Roy makes Canada's past injustice toward indigenous peoples visible too. She credits harsh lessons about discrimination she learned as a rural teacher for motivating her humanistic fiction later on. Most of all, Roy inspires fellow humans through her faith in imagination's redemptive power to turn darkness visible while transporting readers toward truth and light. She proves creative passion can lift quiet voices and transcend all barriers.

4.2.4 Voss - Patrick White

4.2.4.1 The Australian Landscape

The harsh Australian scrubland has a profound impact on the character Voss in the novel. The harsh and blisteringly hot setting, with its merciless terrain, pushes men to their absolute limits of endurance. Voss and his expedition party, except for one survivor, fall victim to the land's challenges. The novel portrays the land itself as the most potent force, unchanging and indifferent. The burning and waterless desert emerges as the ultimate antagonist that Voss must confront. Even though Voss initially displays egotistical confidence, the land proves unconquerable, gradually wearing away his sense of purpose as he confronts extreme exposure and deprivation.

Patrick White underscores that the environment poses an underestimated and perilous danger to even visionary pioneers. The harsh conditions test not only physical limits but also mental fortitude, revealing the limitations of sheer willpower and ambition against nature's supreme indifference. The harsh land cannot be conquered; it asserts dominance not through direct combat but through indifference and erasure. In the face of this eternal adversary, man appears temporally fragile, undone by overconfidence in his understanding of natural forces. White vividly portrays an indifferent and even hostile landscape, providing a haunting glimpse into Australia's awe-inspiring environment and revealing humanity's destructive misconception of superiority over it.

4.2.4.2 Voss's Pride Versus Hebden's Care

Patrick White draws a clear distinction between Voss's ill-fated expedition and Colonel Hebden's later search party in the

► Distinct expeditions

challenging Australian wilderness. Colonel Hebden, practical and well-prepared, carefully equips his rescue mission and selects capable companions. When faced with mortal threats, Hebden prioritizes survival and wisely calls off the quest, showcasing a balanced approach to confronting the desert's perils.

► Wise leadership

In contrast to Voss, who recklessly pushes forward despite warnings, Hebden values the wisdom of experienced frontiersmen, recognizing the dangers of the backcountry. Importantly, Hebden retreats promptly when excessive ambition poses a threat, highlighting a sharp contrast with Voss's uncontrolled determination. Ultimately, Hebden's sensible risk management reflects humility and pragmatism as essential for navigating Australia's challenging landscape. This approach serves as a rebuke to Voss's arrogant disregard for the land's formidable resistance, emphasizing the importance of understanding and respecting its power.

► Supreme bond

4.2.4.3 Psychic Bond and Spiritual Connection

The unique mental connection crafted by White between Voss and the distant Laura Trevelyan carries symbolic significance as their psychic affinity deepens. Despite being physically distant, their uncanny shared visions suggest a spiritual closeness that goes beyond mere proximity. White hints at the idea of a fated romantic pairing, portraying a mysterious charisma between unlikely kindred spirits, a timeless notion of soul mates. This narrative device also allows the exploration of cross-cultural bonds, symbolized by Voss and Laura's psychic connection bridging the gap between the old-world order and new-world possibilities under unfriendly skies.

► Psychic transformation

Crucially, as Voss envisions Laura enduring similar hardships during his desert journey, he spiritually initiates her into the pilgrimage through psychic projection. This connection plays a role in motivating her later development, fostering maturity and independence. Their fleeting rapport transcends mere fantasy, becoming a vital and transformative force. White uses their unlikely connection to highlight the subtle boundary between reality and imagination, emphasizing the intricate interplay between matter and spirit.

This connection between Voss and Laura also serves as a reflection of Australia's dual European and Aboriginal heritage. It acts as a bridge across vast distances, drawing



► Cultural bridges

on persistent myths and dreams to transform the challenging frontiers into shared inner landscapes. White thus weaves a narrative that goes beyond the physical realm, exploring the enduring power of cultural and spiritual connections to shape and transform lives.

► Religious discord

4.2.4.4 Religion as Failed Moral Compass

People in the Voss expedition have strong disagreements about religion. Voss, who doesn't believe in God, sees the journey as a necessity but doesn't pay much attention to religious ideas. He thinks that believing in religious doctrines shows weakness and superstition. Frank, his capable lieutenant, shares this view and prefers using reason rather than relying on promises from the Bible. On the other hand, Harry has a childlike trust in the Bible, believing that divine mystery will help him overcome his fears. Palfreyman, caught between Harry's strong faith and Voss's disbelief, experiences religious doubt. He struggles with questions about evil, especially in response to his sister's deformities despite his prayers.

► Deserted faith

As the harsh landscape becomes even more challenging, the expedition has to decide whether to hold onto Christian hope or reject religion in the face of nature's brutality. Ultimately, the desert doesn't provide salvation, and Harry's unwavering worship doesn't save them. Voss, lost in a chaotic and godless situation, finds that the heavens are silent, making earlier religious debates irrelevant. Patrick White uses this clash between belief and atheism to show the weaknesses of Christianity's moral framework when isolated from society, revealing its limitations against a world without moral order.

Summarised Overview

This unit explores Canadian and Australian prose literature that deals with themes of identity, injustice, and the power of landscape. Sharon Pollock's play *The Komagata Maru Incident* sheds light on a racist incident in Canada's past, where Indian immigrants were denied entry. Jack Davis' drama *No Sugar* protests against the oppression of Aboriginal Australians under assimilation policies. Gabrielle Roy's memoir *Enchantment and Sorrow* explores her development as an author, facing barriers as a woman but finding joy in writing. Patrick White's novel *Voss* follows an explorer crossing the harsh Australian desert, highlighting the landscape's dominance over human ambition and the limitations of religion as a moral compass.

The writings confront histories of prejudice, illuminate marginalized voices, and examine the impact of environment and landscape on individual experiences. They offer insights into national identities, social injustices, and the resilience of cultures in the face of adversity.

Assignments

1. Discuss how Sharon Pollock's play *The Komagata Maru Incident* addresses systemic racism in Canada's past and the importance of giving voice to marginalized perspectives.
2. Analyze Jack Davis' portrayal of the Millimurra family in *No Sugar* and how it challenges stereotypes about Aboriginal Australians, highlighting their dignity and resilience in the face of oppression.
3. Examine the significance of landscape and environment in Patrick White's novel *Voss*, and how it shapes the characters' experiences and challenges their ambitions.
4. Explore the themes of loneliness, creative expression, and barriers faced by women in Gabrielle Roy's memoir *Enchantment and Sorrow*.
5. Discuss the role of literature in addressing social injustice, giving voice to marginalized groups, and promoting cultural understanding, as reflected in the works discussed in this unit.

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7. White, Patrick. *Voss: Introduction by Nicholas Shakespeare*, Knopf Doubleday, 2012.
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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Model Question Paper Sets



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

Model Question Paper- Set-I

**MA ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
M21EG02DE- CANADIAN AND AUSTRALIAN LITERATURES
THIRD SEMESTER - DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE**

(CBCS - PG)

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A - Objective Type Questions

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences each. Each question carries 2 marks. (5x2=10 Marks)

1. What is the legal doctrine used by Arthur Philip to claim Australia as a British dominion?
2. What does the term "first natives" refer to in the context of Canadian and Australian literature?
3. Which year was "Song of the Great Spirit" composed?
4. What is the full name of the author "A.D. Hope"?
5. At which university did A.D. Hope give lectures in the late 1930s?
6. In which year did the Japanese steamer transport more than 300 British subjects from Punjab, India, to Canada?
7. Write the significance of the setting of Sharon Pollock's play *The Komagata Maru Incident* in a 1914 Vancouver brothel in two sentences.
8. What genre is Gabrielle Roy's *Enchantment and Sorrow*?

Section B

Answer any six of the following questions in half a page each. Each question carries

5 marks

(6x5=30 Marks)

9. Analyse how the founding of penal colonies impacted native cultures and social structures in Australia during early colonisation.
10. Discuss how A.D. Hope uses sound techniques in “Australia” to critique Australian cultural identity.
11. Analyse how the “Song of the Great Spirit” and Atwood’s “Notes Towards a Poem” explore themes of mortality.
12. Briefly summarise the key events and imagery in David Malouf’s poem “The Year of the Foxes.”
13. How does the poem “Australia” by A.D. Hope critique Australian cultural identity and values in the postwar period?
14. Analyse the character of William Hopkinson in *The Komagata Maru Incident* and how his inner conflict reflects Canada’s colonial history and racism.
15. Compare and contrast how different characters in *No Sugar* resist or accommodate injustice from authorities.
16. Explain the significance of the memoir’s title *Enchantment and Sorrow*. What do the terms, enchantment and sorrow, represent to Roy?
17. Explain how Jack Davis uses the character of Jimmy Munday in his play *No Sugar* to explore the impact of assimilation policies on Aboriginal individuals.
18. Examine the significance of landscape and environment in Patrick White’s novel *Voss*, and how it shapes the characters’ experiences and challenges their ambitions.

Section C

Answer any two of the following questions in four pages each. Each question carries 15

marks.

(2x15= 30 Marks)

19. What are the main distinctions in the ways that Australia and Canada, as former penal colonies, contributed to the development of national literature that reflected both their colonial pasts and indigenous cultures? Discuss.
20. Assess the effectiveness of A.D. Hope’s ambivalent patriotism in portraying the paradoxes of Australian national identity in “Australia.”
21. Identify and closely analyse *Enchantment and Sorrow* demonstrating Roy’s rich and transportive prose.

22. Examine Sharon Pollock's use of artistic techniques in her play, *The Komagata Maru Incident*, to address racism in Canada's past. Consider her use of fictionalisation and the significance of giving voice to marginalised immigrant perspectives. Evaluate Talcott Parson's main components in his sociological framework.

SGGOU



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

Model Question Paper- Set-II

MA ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

M21EG02DE- CANADIAN AND AUSTRALIAN LITERATURES

THIRD SEMESTER - DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE

(CBCS - PG)

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences each. Each question carries 2 marks. (5x2=10 Marks)

1. What effects did the 1850s gold rush have on Australia's population?
2. Give the title of a work in which the theme of dispossession of land has been depicted in Australian literature
3. Briefly explain the key phases of disruption and resilience in Blackfoot culture.
4. When was *Double Persephone*, Margaret Atwood's debut poetry collection, published?
5. What is the name of the Aboriginal family depicted in Jack Davis' play *No Sugar*?
6. How could lessons from *The Komagata Maru Incident* about overcoming prejudice be applied to present-day debates over immigration and national identity?
7. What is the full name of Sharon Pollock's play discussed?
8. What era was Patrick White's novel *Voss* set in?

Section B

Answer any six of the following questions in half a page each. Each question carries 5 marks. (6x5=30 Marks)

9. Analyse how the issue of cultural dispossession has been explored in both Canadian and Australian literature.
10. Analyse how Canadian writers examine immigration experiences to address themes of identity, belonging, and displacement.
11. Compare and contrast how Blackfoot spirituality in the “Song of the Great Spirit” and Atwood’s portrayal of trauma in “Notes Towards a Poem” represent Canadian cultural diversity.
12. Apply ideas from David Malouf’s “The Year of the Foxes” to analyse postwar suburban culture in Australian literature.
13. Discuss Margaret Atwood’s main arguments in “Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written” regarding the duty of poets to confront injustice.
14. In what ways does the “Song of the Great Spirit” represent continuity with oral traditions and themes that shaped contemporary Indigenous Canadian literature?
15. Analyse David Malouf’s evocative imagery in “The Year of the Foxes” and how it captures the disturbing undercurrents of Australian postwar suburbia.
16. Explain the historical oppression faced by Indigenous people in *No Sugar*.
17. Discuss the significance of Pollock’s choice to set the play *The Komagata Maru Incident* in a brothel and how it contributes to the play’s overall theme and critique of Canadian society.
18. Discuss the main events and themes in Gabrielle Roy’s memoir *Enchantment and Sorrow* regarding her early life and development as an author.

Section C

Answer any two of the following questions in four pages each. Each question carries 15 marks. (2x15= 30 Marks)

19. Analyse how prominent Canadian writers portray and examine the immigrant experience through their works.
20. Analyse how nature symbolism in the “Song of the Great Spirit” and imagery of fox furs in Malouf’s poem “The Year of the Foxes” explore humanity’s complex moral relationship with the environment.
21. Analyse how symbolism is used in *No Sugar* to convey the trauma inflicted on the passengers and the hypocrisy of the government’s action.

22. Examine how Patrick White depicts Australia's landscape in the novel *Voss* and how it affects the characters' experiences. Discuss how the Australian landscape emerges as the dominant force that challenges human ambition. Elaborate on Human mind by Levi Strauss.

SGSOU

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ശ്രദ്ധപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുതിരുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പറണം

ശാസ്ത്രവ്യാപ്തിയെന്നുമേകണം
ജാതിഭേദമാകെ മാറണം
ബോധരശ്മിയിൽ തിളങ്ങുവാൻ
ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

കുറിപ്പുഴ ശ്രീകുമാർ

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