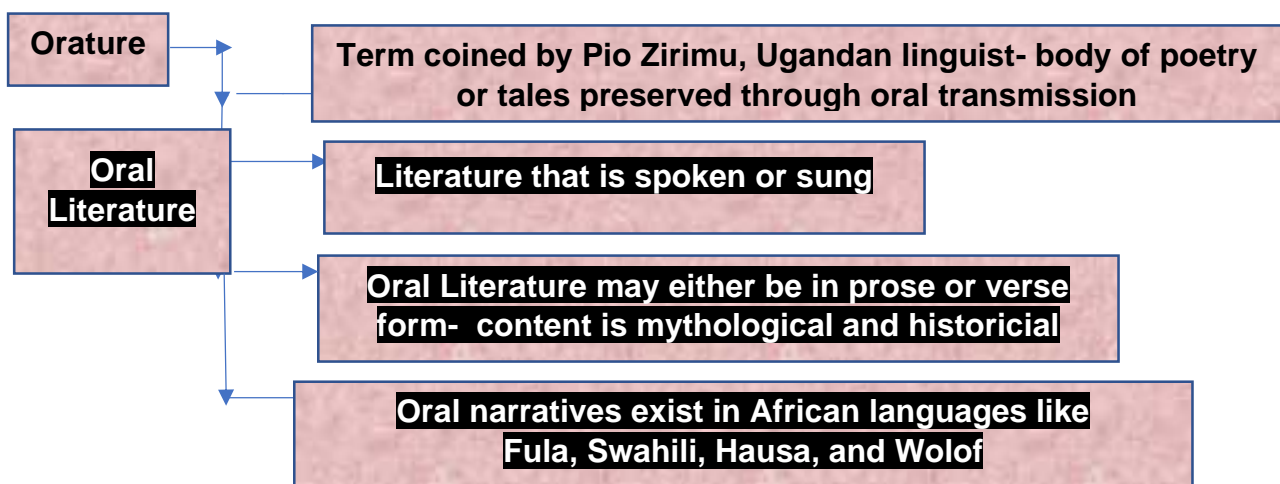
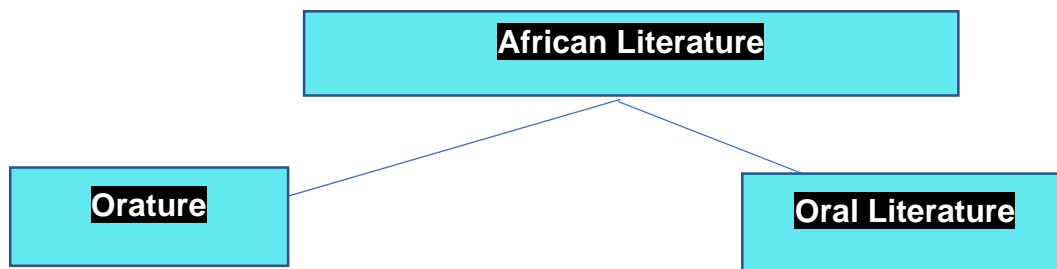
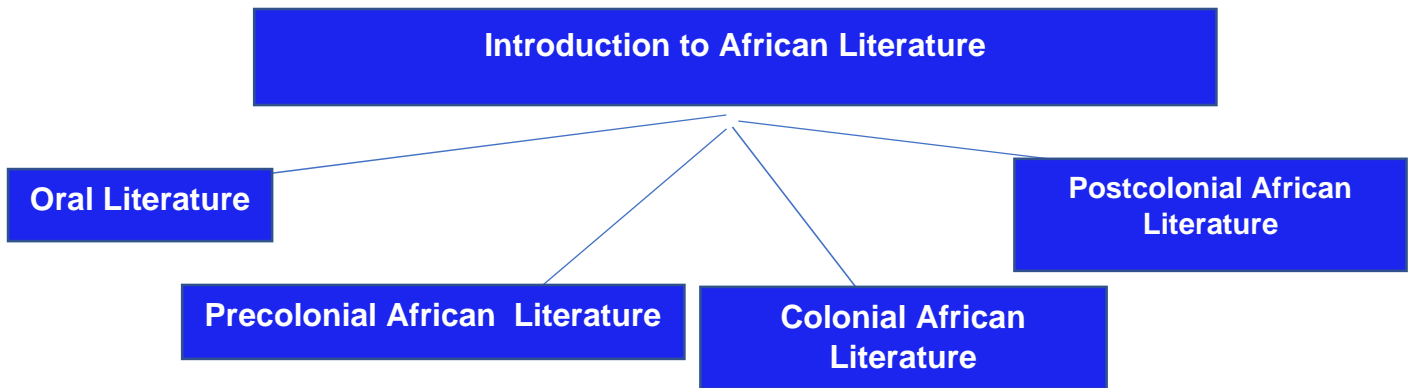
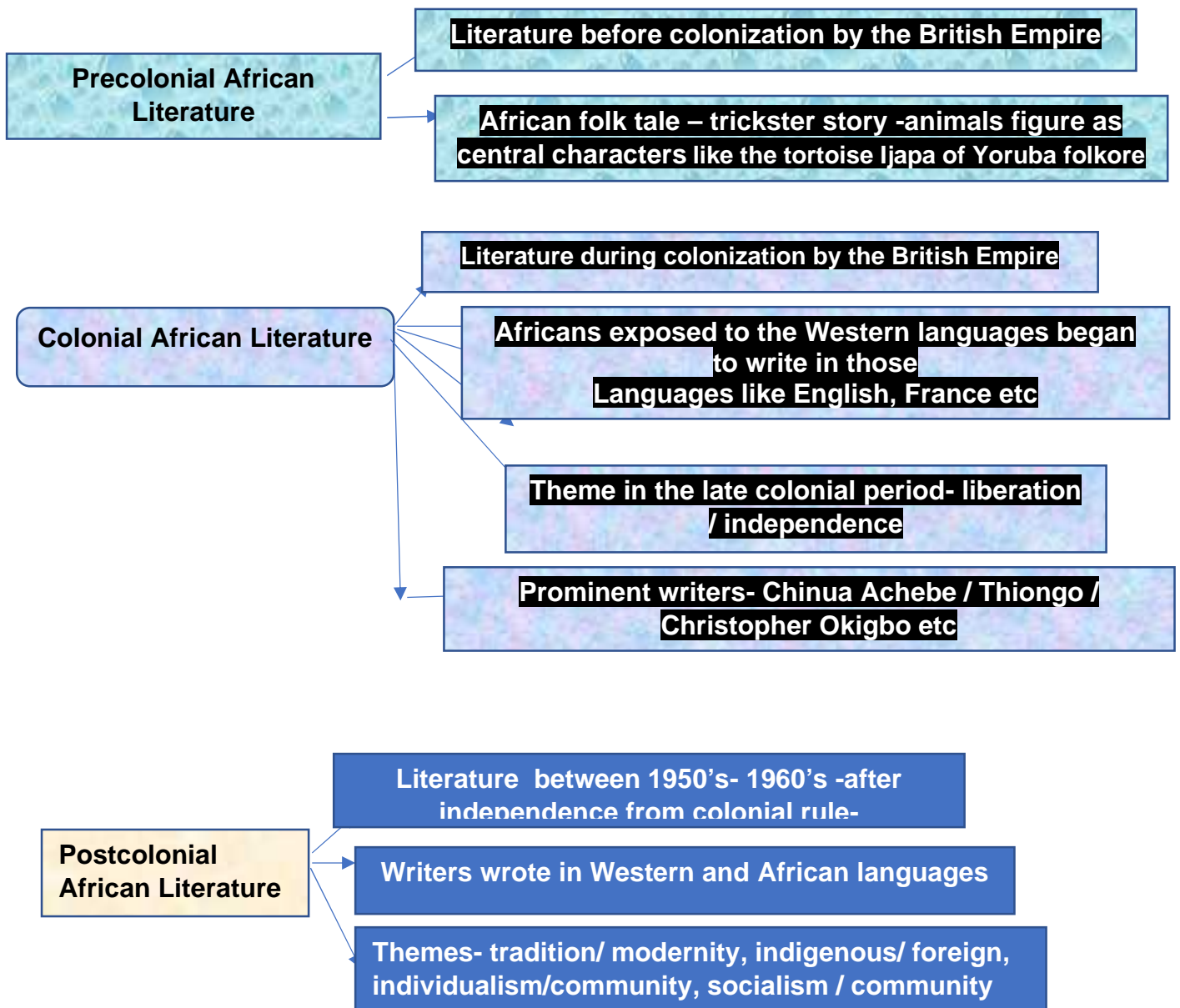


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INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN POETRY

English was the common language spoken in the West and East African countries like Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. The poet Abioseh Nicol of Sierra Leo portrays the picture of Africa in the postcolonial period in the poem titled *The Meaning of Africa* :

*You are not a country, Africa,
 You are a concept,
 Fashioned in our minds, each to each,
 To hide our separate fears,
 To dream our separate dreams*

The dreams of the African poets in the postcolonial period was unique and distinct. It was separate from the African poets who wrote in European languages like French, Arabic, Ahmaric, Portuguese, Spanish etc.

INTRODUCTION TO NIGERIAN POETRY

An extensive output in Anglophone poetry of Nigerian Literature occurred between the 1980's and the 2000's. The central thematic concern of the Nigerian poets was a response to the military dictatorship of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. As victims of military oppression, these poets observed the degeneration of Nigeria under military despotism. Their creative and intellectual activities were clamped down. The Nigerian poets of the later period demystified the intent of their poetry. They advocated a return to the native traditions as implied in the coinage "alter-native tradition" by Aiyejina. The Nigerian poets attacked the excessive Europeanisation of African literature. They initiated an extremist appropriation of traditional African idioms, folklore and myth, and rejected the "borrowed items", in the phrase of Charles Bodunde.

INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY OF GABRIEL OKARA



Gabrile Okara is a modern Nigerian poet and novelist. He belonged to a generation of poets who wrote after independence. The poem "You laughed, and laughed, and laughed is one of the much anthologised poems of Gabriel Okara.

The poetry of Okara is one of protest, frustration and failure coupled with affirmation. In the poem titled "Piano and Drums", the poet Okara declared the significance and value of the African soul :

*"The mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
primal youth and the beginning"*

Gabriel Okara belongs to the first generation of Modern Nigerian poets like Christopher Okigbo, J.P Clark and Wole Soyinka. The poem titled " The Call of the River Nun" won the best all round award at the Nigerian festival of Arts in the year 1953. Okara is understood as " the poet of the mystic inside." The mystic voice of the poet lends uniqueness and distinctiveness to the poetry of Okara. The word " inside" that figures predominantly in the poems of Okara is not a poetic conceit. It connotes a geographic location that exists inside the poet's inner world and psyche. The " inside" is the poet's inner being or true self or the spiritual side. The poet dichotomises the inner self as a separate entity from that of the physical self. The physical self is tactile but the inner self is veiled and mysterious, perceived only by the sixth sense. The poet admits people whom he trusts into the inner core of the self, namely the "inside." Music serves as one of the catalyst to gain entry into the mystic inside. The other stimulus to gain entry into the mystic inside is the dream. In the poem " The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down", the poet Gabriel Okara finds the wintry months of North America unendurable. He pines for the balminess of the African climate though dream.

Gabriel Okara represents the negritude sensibility among the West African poets writing in English. He appeals to the values of the African cultural inheritance in the manner of Senghor. The mastery of rhythm distinguishes the poetry of Okara from the other Nigerian poets of his generation. He has mastered the rhythms to be sung. Okara achieves the feat of rhythm through repetition, manipulation of the repetitive words or parallel structures.

SUMMARY OF THE POEM THE SNOW FLAKES SAIL GENTLY DOWN

Stanza 1

The snow flakes sail gently down from the misty eye of the sky and fall lightly lightly on the winter-weary elms. And the branches, winter-striped and nude, slowly with the weight of the weightless snow bow like grief-stricken mourners as white funeral cloth is slowly unrolled over deathless earth. And dead sleep stealthily from the heater rose and closed my eyes with the touch of silk cotton of water falling

Stanza 2

Then I dreamed a dream in my dead sleep. But I dreamed not of earth dying and elms a vigil keeping. I dreamed of birds, black birds flying in my inside, nesting and hatching on oil palms bearing suns for fruits and with roots denting the uprooter's spades. And I dreamed the uprooters tired and limp, leaning on my roots – their abandoned roots – and the oil palms gave them each a sun. But on their palms they balanced the blinding orbs and frowned with schisms on their brows – for the suns reached not the brightness of gold.

Then I awoke. I awoke to the silently falling snow and bent-backed elms bowing and swaying to the winter wind like white-robed Moslems salaaming at evening prayer, and the earth lying inscrutable like the face of a god in a shrine.

Explanation

Stanza 1

The poet finds the cold months of the North American winter unbearable. He longs for the warmth of the African climate. This stanza describes the small pieces of snow that falls gently down from the sky. The eye of the sky is misty. The eye of the sky is bleary because of the snow flakes. The poet describes the fall of the snow flakes through the adjectives "gently" and "lightly." The fall of the snow flakes does not produce any noise. Without any noise, the snow flakes fall down on the elm

trees. The elm tree has lost its leaves during the season of winter. The tree is burdened with the weight of the snowflakes that gently fall down. The elm tree is tired of bearing the weight of the snowflakes. The elm tree is rather bored to bear the weight of the snowflakes during the course of winter. The branches of the elm tree are winter-stripped. The elm tree is deprived of its leaves which has molted in wintertime. The poet describes the elm tree as winter-stripped. The two possible meanings are either the elm tree is stripped of its leaves during the winter season or the snowflakes falling on the tree has formed white stripes on the tree. The poet describes the elm tree as nude since the winter season has removed the natural foliage of the tree and it is bare nude in the winter season but for the gentle snowflakes that fall gently on it. This stanza depicts the longing of the elm tree for its natural foliage. It also throws an insight into the nostalgic longing of the poet for the African climate.

The elm tree bears the weightless snow and is bent forward because of the weightless snow. The bent posture of the elm tree is compared by the poet to that of grief-stricken mourners. A mourner attending a funeral ceremony would bend his head or keep his head bent to show his respect for the departed soul. In this case, the elm tree is bent because of the weightless snowflakes. The tree is unable to express its grief in having to bear the weight of the weightless snowflakes while at the same time mourning the stripping of its natural foliage during the winter season. The presence of the snowflakes on the elm tree is compared by the poet to that of a shroud. A shroud is a white cloth, used to cover a dead body. The elm tree covered with the white snow-flakes appears like a shroud to the poet. The elm tree is dead since it is deprived of its natural foliage. The tree is dead but not the earth. Though the earth is covered with snowflakes, it is eternally alive.

The poet is experiencing the winter season in North America. But he has not forgotten his native African climate. He seeks reprieve time and again in reminiscences of his nation Africa. He experiences biting cold. The warmth that he longs for is provided by the heater. The poet puns on the word dead. The elm tree is dead because it is deprived of its natural foliage. The poet is dead because he is uprooted from his native land Africa. The heat that is produced from the heater secretly rises above and provides warmth to the poet. The soothing warmth of the heat is like a silk cloth, the touch of which provides comfort to the tired eyes.

Stanza II

The poet Okara dreams of black birds. He does not dream of the lifeless earth with the elm trees being vigilant. He dreams of black birds. The poet dreams of African land- oil palms bearing fruits in the sun. The word inside is not a mere poetic conceit with Okara. It is a real geographic location existing inside the poet's inner world and psyche.

“**Inside**” is the poet's inner being, his true self, the spiritual side that is the real man. He sees the inner self as a separate entity from his physical self, that self that others see and feel and touch. The inside is hidden, though it can be perceived with the sixth sense. He longs for the warmth of the African climate, which he achieves by gaining entry into his inside through dream. "Inside" here signifies the beauty and warmth of the African landscape.

This kind of nostalgia for the African landscape is one reason why Okara is seen as a representative of the Negritude sensibility among West African poets writing in English. He appeals to the values of our cultural inheritance in the manner of Senghor. Emotions tamed and disciplined are stored away in the inside, and when these emotions are stirred up, they fly out of the inside physically. The oil palm tree dented the spade of the uprooter. The image of the roots of the palm tree denting the spade of the uprooter is a reference to the colonisation of Africa by Britain. The coloniser attempted to uproot the native African culture, tradition, religion and language.

The uprooter who tried to remove the palm tree failed in his attempt. The roots of the palm tree were strong enough to cause dent in the spade. The uprooter became tired and limp. He had to abandon the palm tree. The palm tree continued to bear fruits in the sun. The image of the uprooter trying in vain to uproot the palm tree is an indirect reference to the attempts by the coloniser to dislodge the African culture, tradition, society, religion and language. The coloniser had to finally abandon the African land in vain.

The palm tree was able to withstand the heat and brightness of the sun and bore fruits in the shape of orbs. The perseverance of the palm tree bearing fruits enduring the heat and brightness of the scorch heat of the sun is a reference to the patient perseverance of the African people during the colonial onslaught. The African people under colonisation had to endure torture, suffering, pain and insult. They withstood the insult with stoic patience and fortitude. The African society has started to thrive and re-emerge with force and pride after the colonial period.

Stanza III

The poet wakes up after the dream. He is a witness to the silent fall of the snowflakes. The elm tree sways in the winter wind- bends forward and backward. The image of the elm tree bending forward and backward reminds the poet Okara of the devout Muslim in prayer, in the mosque. Nature in general and the earth in particular remains inscrutable during this climatic change. The inscrutable nature of the Earth is like that of God in a shrine. The poet also alludes to the African people who withstood the colonial onslaught with forbearance and fortitude.

Glossary

1. **Snowflakes**-small piece of snow that falls from the sky
2. **Misty**-covered with mists, dim in outline, a person's eyes filled with tears to blur vision
3. **Lightly**- gently.
4. **Sail**-to move quickly and easily.
5. **Weary** - tired / bored with something because one has experienced too much of something.
6. **Elm** -a tree that loses its leaves in winter
7. **Striped**- something that has stripes in it / strip- to remove the covering
8. **Nude**-not wearing any clothes
9. **Bow**- to bend your head or body forward out of respect
10. **Grief-stricken**-sadness at the death of someone
11. **Mourners**- a person at the funeral
12. **Funeral** – religious ceremony either to cremate or bury a dead person.
13. **Funeral - cloth** – a shroud
14. **Shroud**- a white cloth to cover a dead body
15. **Unrolled**-to open and become flat from opened position.
16. **Deathless**- lasting for ever and never to be forgotten.
17. **Sleep**- the resting state in which the body is inactive and the mind is unconscious.
18. **Dead**-not living
19. **Stealthily** – not to be seen or heard, secretly /
20. **Silk**- a delicate and soft cloth.
20. **Heater**- a device that produces heat.
21. **Dream** - a series of events or images that happen in your mind when you are sleeping.
22. **Vigil** - a period of staying awake - to be with someone who is ill or to call public attention to something.
23. **Hatching**-to (cause an egg to) break in order to allow a young animal to come out, to make a plan, especially a secret plan.

24. **Palm tree**-a tree that grows in hot countries and has a tall trunk with a mass of long pointed leaves at the top.
25. **Dent**-a small hollow mark in the surface of something, caused by pressure or by being hit.
26. **Uproot**-to pull a plant including its roots out of the ground, to remove a person from their home or environment.
27. **Limp**- to walk slowly and with difficulty because of having an injured or painful leg or foot, soft and neither firm nor stiff
28. **Lean**-to move your body away from a vertical position so that it is bent forward or resting against something, or to place something in a sloping position against something.
29. **Abandon**-to leave a place, thing, or person, usually for ever.
30. **Roots**-family origins, or the particular place from which one hails.
31. **Blinding**- extremely bright
32. **Orbs**- something in the shape of a ball
33. **Frown**- to bring your eyebrows together so that there are lines on your face above your eyes, often while turning the corners of your mouth downwards, showing that you are annoyed, worried, sad, or thinking hard
34. **Schisms**- a division into two groups caused by a disagreement about ideas
35. **Brows**- the forehead
36. **Swaying**- to move slowly from side to side
37. **Salaam**- in Muslim countries) to greet someone by bending low from the waist with the front of the right hand against the top of the face
38. **Inscrutable**-not showing emotions or thoughts and therefore very difficult to understand or get to know
39. **Shrine**- a place for worship that is holy because of a connection with a holy person or object.

Essay on the poem Snow Flakes Fall Gently Down

Gabriel Okara belongs to the first generation of Modern Nigerian poets like Christopher Okigbo, J.P Clark and Wole Soyinka. The poem titled “ The Call of the River Nun” won the best all round award at the Nigerian festival of Arts in the year 1953. Okara is understood as “ the poet of the mystic inside.” The mystic voice of the poet lends uniqueness and distinctiveness to the poetry of Okara. The poetry of Okara is one of protest, frustration and failure coupled with affirmation. In the poem titled “Piano and Drums”, the poet Okara declared the significance and value of the African soul :

*"The mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
primal youth and the beginning"*

Gabriel Okara finds the cold months of the North American winter unbearable. He longs for the warmth of the African climate. The poet describes the fall of the snow flakes gently on the elm tree. The elm tree has lost its foliage during the season of winter. The tree is weighed down with the snowflakes. Okara pronounces the elm tree as winter-stripped. The elm tree is either stripped of its foliage or the snowflakes has formed white stripes on the tree. The elm tree longs for its natural foliage in wintertime. The poet Okara is nostalgic about the African climate. The elm tree bears the weightless snow and is bent forward because of the weightless snow. The bent posture of the elm tree is associated by the poet to that of grief-stricken mourners. The elm tree covered with the white snow-flakes appears like a shroud to the poet. The elm tree is dead since it is deprived of its natural foliage. The tree is dead but not the earth. Though the earth is covered with snowflakes, it is eternally alive.

The poet dreams of African land- oil palms bearing fruits in the sun. The word inside is not a mere poetic conceit with Okara. It is a real geographic location existing inside the poet's inner world and psyche :

**“Then I dreamed a dream
in my dead sleep. But I dreamed
not of earth dying and elms a vigil
keeping. I dreamed of birds, black
birds flying in my inside, nesting...”**

The word “ inside” that figures predominantly in the poems of Okara is not a poetic conceit. It connotes a geographic location that exists inside the poet's inner world and psyche. The “ inside” is the poet's inner being or true self or the spiritual side. The poet dichotomises the inner self as a separate entity from that of the physical self. The physical self is tactile but the inner self is veiled and mysterious, perceived only by the sixth sense. The poet admits people whom he trusts into the inner core of the self, namely the “inside.” He yearns for the warmth of the African climate, which he achieves by gaining entry into his inside through dream. "Inside" here signifies the beauty and warmth of the African landscape.

The image of the roots of the palm tree denting the spade of the uprooter alludes to the colonisation of Africa by Britain. The coloniser attempted to deracinate the native African culture, tradition, religion and language. The palm tree was able to endure the heat and brightness of the sun and bore fruits in the shape of orbs. The perseverance of the palm tree bearing fruits enduring the heat and brightness of the scorch heat alludes to the perseverance of the African people during the colonial onslaught. The African people under colonisation had to endure torture , suffering, pain and insult. They withstood the insult with stoic patience and fortitude. The African society has started to thrive and re-emerge with force and pride after the colonial period

The poet wakes up after the dream. He is a witness to the silent fall of the snowflakes. The elm tree sways in the winter wind- bends forward and backward. The image of the elm tree bending forward and backward reminds the poet Okara of the devout Muslim in prayer, in the mosque. Nature in general and the earth in particular remains inscrutable during climatic change. The inscrutable nature of the Earth is like that of God in a shrine. The poet also alludes to the African people who withstood the colonial onslaught with forbearance and fortitude.

Gabriel Okara represents the negritude sensibility among the West African poets writing in English. He appeals to the values of the African cultural inheritance in the manner of Senghor. The mastery of rhythm distinguishes the poetry of Okara from the other Nigerian poets of his generation. He has mastered the rhythms to be sung. Okara achieves the feat of rhythm through repetition, manipulation of the repetitive words or parallel structures. In the first stanza of the poem “ The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down”, a subtle form of repetition takes place:

**“The snow flakes sail gently
down from the misty eye of the sky
and fall lightly lightly on the
winter-weary elms. And the branches,
winter-striped and nude, slowly
with the weight of the weightless snow
bow like grief-stricken mourners
as white funeral cloth is slowly
unrolled over deathless earth.
And dead sleep stealthily from the
heater rose and closed my eyes with
the touch of silk cotton of water falling.”**

The words ‘gently’, ‘lightly’, ‘slowly’, ‘stealthily’ are spaced-out to avoid the waning of their impact on the reader. The use of repetitive sounds like the ‘el’ sound in the words like “flakes,” “sail”, “gently” in the first line and the concordance of sound between “eye” and “sky” and word combinations “winter-weary”, “winter-stripped” and “grief-stricken” provide sources of rhythm in the poem. The poet relies on such sources of rhythm for musical effect.

Short Questions

1. Why does Gabriel Okara find the winter of North America unbearable?
2. Why does Gabriel Okara long for the African climate?
3. Why is the eye of the sky misty?
4. What adjectives does Gabriel Okara use to describe the snowflakes?
5. How does the snow flakes fall on the elm tree?
6. Why are the elm trees winter-stripped?
7. Why is the elm tree tired of bearing the weight of the snowflakes?
8. Why does Gabriel Okara describe the elm tree as nude?
9. Why is the elm tree bent forward?
10. Why does the poet Gabriel Okara compare the snowflakes on the elm tree to a shroud?
11. Why does Gabriel Okara dream of black birds?
12. What is the symbolic significance of “inside” in the poem Snowflakes Sail Gently Down?
13. What is the significance of the image of oil-palm tree and the uprooter in the poem Snowflakes Sail Gently Down?
14. What does the image of the elm tree bending forward and backward remind Gabriel Okara?

INTRODUCTION TO BLACK CANADIAN WRITING

Black Canadian writing alludes to narratives by Black Canadian writers who had immigrated to Canada. The literature of Black Canadian writing discloses the psychological, sociological and historical consequence of migration and its effect on black female psyche. The Black Canadian women writers use the landscape as a metaphor of psychological reflection and self-awareness. The black female characters articulate their understanding of the self in relation to their environ. The prominent Black Women writers in Canada are Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua P. Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton, Marlene NourbeSe Philip, Makeda Silvera, Tessa Me Watt and Adrienne Shadd. These women writers write about the experience of Black women in Canadian history.

In the book titled *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada*, Cecil Foster (1996) observes,

“when most people in the wider society think of Canada, they automatically assume White. So when . the media discuss the contribution of the Canadian soldier to building and preserving this country, they automatically think and depict White. There is no mention of the role played by the sons and daughters of Africa in the past wars, . . . the majority- voice seems to be saying all too loudly that Blacks in Canada are refugees, recently arrived immigrants, a drain on society, criminals and welfare bums who should be sent back to where they came from.”

The Black in Canada is positioned as an outsider/ stranger in relation to the nation-state rather than as an insider.

INTRODUCTION TO DIONNE BRAND



Canadian poet – wrote about the lives of Black women who have been domestics as part of their transition from "the life of lack" in the Caribbean to "one of opportunity" in Canada. These past lived experiences are important to understand the present Black female experiences- a past to which Black writers, both women and men, have rendered literary justice

SUMMARY OF THE POEM RETURN

Stanza 1

So the street is still there, still melting with sun
still the shining waves of heat at one o'clock
the eyelashes scorched, staring the distance of the
park to the parade stand, still razor grass burnt and
cropped, everything made indistinguishable from dirt
by age and custom, white washed, and the people...

Stanza 2

still I suppose the scorpion orchid by the road,
that fine red tongue of flamboyant and orange lips muzzling the air, that green plum turning fat and
crimson, still the crazy bougainvillea fancying and
nettling itself purple, pink, red, white, still the trickle of
sweat and cold flush of heat raising the smell of cotton and skin...

Stanza 3

still the dank rank of breadfruit milk, their bash and rain on steps, still the bridge this side
the sea that side, the rotting ship barnacle eaten still
the butcher's blood staining the walls of the market,
the ascent of hills, stony and breathless, the dry
yellow patches of earth still threaten to swamp at the next deluge...

Stanza 4

so the road, that stretch of sand and pitch struggling up, glimpses sea, village, earth
bare-footed hot, women worried, still the faces, masked in sweat and sweetness, still the eyes
watery, ancient, still the hard, distinct, brittle smell of slavery.

Explanation

Stanza 1

The poem begins with a repetitive use of the word "still". The word 'still' is infused with multiple meanings. The use of 'still' is suggestive of the nostalgia indulged in by the poet. The speaker is in a geographically distant land from that of the native soil. The poem alludes to the plight of the black women who immigrated to Canada as domestic workers. The black women as domestic workers have sweated in Canada but have not won recognition. They are still the outsider.

The heat of the African landscape is in total contrast to that of the Canadian landscape - cold. The poet or the speaker is nostalgic of the street in Africa. Activities continue to happen in the street, despite the migration of the speaker to Canada. Though in a place of opportunity, the speaker is unable to forget the experience of slavery.

Stanza 2

The orchid by the road is red like the scorpion. The orchid is deadly. The shape of the orchid flower is like that of a bright orange coloured lip. The mouth of the orchid muzzles or silences the wind that is blowing. The plum tree bears a deep red fruit. The bougainvillea blooms in purple, pink, red and white. Sweat trickles down the body of the speaker who does domestic work.

Stanza 3

The breadfruit is of good quality and smells strong. The rain hits the steps. The speaker refers to the bridge and the sea on either side. In the sea, the barnacle stuck to the decayed ship is consumed. The walls of the market are stained with the butcher's blood. The hills around are stony with no foliage. The earth is dry and yellow with dried foliage. The earth is dry in expectation of a deluge.

Stanza 4

The road on the street is a pointer to the sea, village and the earth. The women walk bare-footed on the road. Their faces are covered with sweat. Yet they are pleasant. Their eyes are pale unable to forget the sufferings and pain of slavery.

Glossary

1. **Still**-continuing to happen (adv), staying in the same position; not moving (adj), to make something stop moving or become more calm(verb), a photograph of a piece of action in a film, a time when it is quiet and calm, a piece of equipment used for making alcohol.
2. **Melting**- the change or process of changing from a solid substance to a liquid.
3. **Waves of Heat**- a period of days during which the weather is much hotter than usual.
4. **Scorched**- slightly burned, or damaged by fire or heat.
6. **Park**-a large area of land with grass and trees usually surrounded by fences or walls, and specially arranged so that people can walk in it for pleasure or children can play in it
7. **Razor Grass**-sharp.
8. **Cropped**- to make something small by cutting.
9. **Indistinguishable**- impossible to notice differences when compared to another similar thing.
10. **Dirt**-dust and soil, unpleasant details about somebody's bad life.
11. **Age and Custom**- belief.
12. **White Washed**- n attempt to stop people finding out the true facts about a situation.
13. **Scorpion Orchid**- A plant with beautiful coloured flowers that has an unusual shape.
14. **Flamboyant**- Brightly Coloured

15. **Muzzling**- a cover that is put over an animal's nose or mouth in order to prevent it from biting- the end of a gun barrel- to prevent someone from speaking or expressing his or her thoughts.
16. **Plum**- a small round fruit with a smooth usually red purple skin, sweet flesh and a large seed.
17. **Crimson**-dark, deep red colour
18. **Crazy Bougainvillea**- a climbing plant, common in hot countries- red and purple flowers
19. **Fancying**- to want to have or do something – an expression of surprise.
20. **Nettling**- a wild plant with heart shaped leaves that are covered with hairs that sting and cause pain- to annoy or anger a person.
22. **Trickle**-the flow of a liquid slowly in a thin line- the arrival and leaving of very small number of people.
23. **Dank**-(especially of buildings and air) wet, cold, and unpleasant / of good quality/
24. **Rank**-smelling strong and unpleasant
25. **Breadfruit**-a large, round tropical fruit that looks and feels like bread after it has been baked
26. **Bash**- a hit.
27. **Rotting**-decay
28. **Barnacle**-a small sea creature with a shell, that sticks very tightly and in large numbers to rocks and the bottom of boats.
29. **Butcher**-to kill or cut up an animal for meat.
30. **Stain**-to leave a mark on something that is difficult to remove.
31. **Swamp**-area of wet soft land.
32. **Deluge** -a very large amount of rain or water.
33. **Stretch**- to spread over a large area or distance.
34. **Pitch**- the piece of ground on which you can put up a tent, park a caravan, etc
35. **Struggling up**- to experience difficulty and make a very great effort in order to do something
36. **Glimpses**- a brief look at someone or something..
37. **Bare-Footed**- not wearing any shoes or socks.
38. **Masked**-wearing a mask
39. **Sweat** - the clear, salty liquid that you pass through your skin, to work very hard to achieve something
40. **Sweetness**- kind, pleasant and satisfying
41. **Watery**- pale or weak in colour or strength
42. **Brittle**- unkind and unpleasant, delicate and easily broken
43. **Slavery**- the condition of being legally owned by someone else and forced to work for or obey them

Essay on the poem Return

Dionne Brand is an immigrant writer from Trinidad to Canada. The lives of Black women who have been domestics, as part of their transition from "the life of lack" in the Caribbean to "one of opportunity" in Canada is conspicuous in the poetry of Dionne Brand. The picture of the position of the Black women as domestic is reflective in nature. The survival instinct of the Black women as domestic hep, in adapting to a new country, a new language, a new way of life, while clinging on to her Carribean culture and belief is a sign of resilient self.

The speaker of the poem *Return* is in a geographically distant land from that of the native soil. The poem alludes to the predicament of the black women who immigrated to Canada as domestic workers. The black women as domestic workers have sweated in Canada but have not won recognition. They are still the outsider. The poet expresses the plight of the Black women in:

**“everything made indistinguishable from dirt
by age and custom, white washed, and the people...”**

The heat of the African landscape is in total contrast to that of the Canadian landscape – wintry chillness. The poet or the speaker is wistful of the street in Africa. Activities continue to pass in the street, regardless of the relocation of the speaker to Canada. Though in a place of opportunity, the speaker is unable to forget the experience of slavery.

The image of the red orchid flower stifling the roaring wind is a pointer to the voiceless Black woman. The road on the street is a pointer to the sea, village and the earth. The women walk bare-footed on the road. Their faces are covered with sweat. Yet they are pleasant. Their eyes are pale unable to forget the sufferings and pain of slavery. The self-esteem of the Black woman neither intimidated by sweat of labour or heat :

**“still the faces,
masked in sweat and sweetness, still the eyes
watery, ancient, still the hard, distinct, brittle smell of
slavery.”**

Self-reliance through dignity of labour has not brought about any change in the treatment of the Black woman. The new place of occupation (Canada) also reeks with slavery. The act of return or looking back at the psycho-physical level is a way of surviving – a constant reminder to oneself that one is “ somebody too.” The Blacks have impacted the Canadian state-development , but the state singles them as “ non-existent.”

In the work titled *No Language is Neutral* published in 1998 by Dionne Brand, the speaker is a Black female immigrant. She reflects on her place of prospect, namely Canada :

**“ Five hundred dollars
and a pass-port full of sand and winking water, is how
I reach here.”**

The adjective “ here” is a place of paradox, interrogated by Black Canadian writers in their corpus of writing. The Black woman immigrant has to comprehend the place, adjust and figure out her place in the “ new place of prospect”. Dionne Brand finds it unviable to voice the experience of enslaved and colonised in the language of the coloniser, a language which is not their ancestral one, succinctly expressed though the image of the orchid:

**“still I suppose the scorpion orchid by the road,
that fine red tongue of flamboyant and orange lips
muzzling the air..”**

Short Questions

1. Why does the poet Dionne Brand repetitively use the word “ still” in the poem *Return*?
2. Why does Dionne Brand refer to the Black woman?
3. Why does Dionne Brand compare the orchid to a scorpion?
4. What change does the poet Dionne Brand notice in the African landscape?
5. Why are the eyes of the Black woman pale?

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTOPHER OKIBO



Christopher Okibo- a Nigerian poet and teacher- poetry connotes a shift from Euromodern to that of Oral African poet- from alienated cosmopolitan to that of committed Biafran

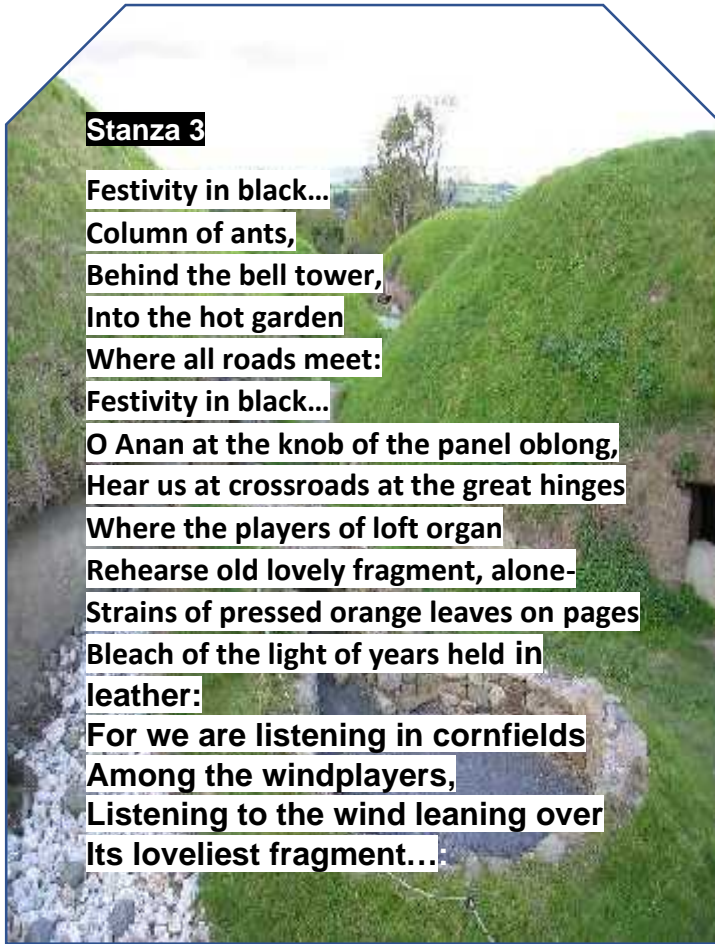
SUMMARY OF THE POEM PASSAGE

Stanza 1

BEFORE YOU, my mother Idoto,
Naked I stand;
Before your weary presence,
A prodigal
Leaning on an oilbean,
Lost in your legend
Under your power wait I
On barefoot,
Watchman for the watchword
At heavensgate;
Out of the depth my cry:
Give ear and hearken...

Stanza 2

DARK WATERS of the beginning.
Ray, violet, and short, piercing the gloom,
Foreshadow the fire that is dreamed of.
Me to the orangery
Solitude invites,
A wagtail, to tell
The tangled-wood-tale;
A sunbird, to mourn
A mother on spray.
Rain and sun in single combat;
On one leg standing,
In silence at the passage
The young bird at the passage
SILENCE FACES at crossroads:



Stanza 3

Festivity in black...
Column of ants,
Behind the bell tower,
Into the hot garden
Where all roads meet:
Festivity in black...
O Anan at the knob of the panel oblong,
Hear us at crossroads at the great hinges
Where the players of loft organ
Rehearse old lovely fragment, alone-
Strains of pressed orange leaves on pages
Bleach of the light of years held in
leather:
For we are listening in cornfields
Among the windplayers,
Listening to the wind leaning over
Its loveliest fragment...

Introduction to the poet

Christopher Okibo is a Nigerian poet. He has published three volumes of poetry- *Heavensgate* (1962), *Limits* (1964) and *Silences* (1965). The collected poems of Christopher Okibo was published under the title *Labyrinths with path of Thunder* in 1971. He evinced expertise and acquaintance with the Igbo mythology. The poem “ Passage” is an extract from the anthology of poems titled *Heavensgate*.

Explanation

Stanza 1

Christopher Okibo left the University College of Ibadan in June 1956. He later worked between 1956 and 1958 as a private secretary to the Federal Ministry of Research and Information in Lagos. He was deprived of a soporific creative life in the Nigerian capital. He draws a contrast between himself as a city dweller and his alter-ego in the village homeland. The poet is sentimental and nostalgic for the innocence of childhood, peace and security of his birthplace. Every travel is construed as a new physical and psychic displacement. The poet desires the countrified well-being rather than the convoluted life in the city. The poet implies that an alternative to the uprooted exile or prodigal is a return in humbleness and repentance to the original source being. The first stanza of the poem begins with this note. Okigbo values the traditional African religious philosophy and practices. It is evident in his invocation to Idoto, the Igbo pantheon of gods and goddesses.

The invocation of Idoto is rooted in the Igbo cosmology. The ‘watery presence” conjoins the physical and the supernatural alluding to water and spirit. The mother principle which is at the heart of traditional African philosophy and culture is embedded in the invocation to Idoto, which is contrary to the more distinct patriarchal basis of European and Western culture. The poet bestows the speaking persona with the attitude of a suppliant before an altar. The suppliant seeks enlightenment. The speaking persona is humble and offers oblation. He is also prepared to receive the responses, which the deity may grant.

The word “ prodigal” biblically alludes to a figure in a parable of Jesus (Luke 15:11–32). The prodigal is a wayward son who squanders his inheritance but returns home to find that his father forgives him.

Stanza 2

At the beginning, the speaking persona of the poem finds himself before the 'watery presence' of Idoto. He is naked, a supplicant, offering himself as a sacrifice to his own poetic impulse. The poet is prepared to suffer creation. The rainbow or the covenant "rain and sun in single combat" is perceived as a snake, capable of both leading and devouring the poet. The rainbow or the snake is an embodiment of good and evil. The image of the dark water alludes to creation and the period of gloom (colonisation in general and the degeneration of Nigeria under military despotism).

Stanza 3

The speaking persona of the poem finds himself before the 'watery presence' of Idoto. He is naked, a supplicant, offering himself as a sacrifice to his own poetic impulse. The speaker moves on to another place of entrance, namely the crossroads in Africa. A queue of worshippers wait before the doors of a church and listen to "old lovely fragments" of pipe-organ music. He finds "From there the scene flashes to another place of entrance or choice, a crossroads in Africa, where a queue of worshippers waits before the doors of a church from which come 'old lovely fragments' of pipe-organ music. The charm and the elegance of the music is conveyed visually in the lines "strains of pressed orange leaves on pages". The word Anan refers to Okibo's mother Anna who died in the year 1935. The music played in the church echoes in the cornfield.

Glossary

1. **Weary**-tired

2. **Prodigal**- someone who spends or uses large amounts of money, time, energy, etc., especially in a way that is not very wise, someone who returns to a place, organization, team, etc. after previously leaving it

3. **Legend**- famous, admired/ old story

4. **Watchman**- a person who is employed to guard a building or several buildings

5. **Watchword**- (a word or phrase that represents) the main ideas or principles directing the way that someone behaves or the way that something is done

6. **Hearken**- to listen

7. **Dark Waters**- unhappy, sad, gloomy

8. **Ray**- a small amount of a feeling that makes you feel happier or more full of hope, a narrow beam of light, heat, or energy, a large flat sea fish.

9. **Violet**- a plant with bluish- purple flower

10. **Piercing**- to suddenly be seen or heard, despite darkness, noise, make a hole with pointed object

11. **Gloom**- feelings of great unhappiness and loss of hope, a situation in which it is nearly dark and difficult to see well

12. **Foreshadow**- to act as a warning or sign of a future event, to suggest the happening of a future event

13. **Fire**- to cause a strong emotion in someone

14. **Solitude**- the situation of being alone, often by choice

15. **Wagtail**- to move from side

16. **Tangled**- confused and complicated

17. **Mourn**- feeling of sadness

18. **Spray**- a single small branch or stem with leaves and flowers on it

19. **Combat**- to try to stop something unpleasant or harmful from happening or increasing

20. **Silence**- to prevent someone from expressing their views or from criticizing or opposing someone:

21. **Passage**- a usually long and narrow part of a building with rooms on one or both sides, or a covered path that connects places, a short piece of writing or music that is part of a larger piece of work,, travel, especially as a way of escape,

an act of moving through somewhere, a journey, the official approval of something, especially a new law, an entrance or opening, the right to travel or to leave a place

22. **Festivity**- a situation in which people are happy and celebrating

23. **Bell Tower**- a tall structure, often part of a church or large building, that contains one or more bells

24. **Anan**- the mother of Okibo

25. **Hinges**- a piece of metal that fastens the edge of a door, window, lid, etc. to something else and allows it to open or close

26. **Rhearse**- to practice

27. **Fragment**- a small piece or a part

Essay on Okibo's poem Passage

Christopher Okibo is a Nigerian poet. He has published three volumes of poetry-*Heavensgate* (1962), *Limits* (1964) and *Silences* (1965). The collected poems of Christopher Okibo was published under the title *Labyrinths with path of Thunder* in 1971. He evinced expertise and acquaintance with the Igbo mythology. The poem "Passage" is an extract from the anthology of poems titled *Heavensgate*. The poetry of Okibo connotes a shift from Euromodernism to that of an oral African poet.

Christopher Okibo left the University College of Ibadan in June 1956. He later worked between 1956 and 1958 as private secretary to the Federal Ministry of Research and Information in Lagos. He was deprived of a soporific creative life in the Nigerian capital. He draws a contrast between himself as a city dweller and his alter-ego in village homeland. The poet is sentimental and nostalgic for the innocence of childhood, peace and security of his birthplace. Every travel is construed as a new physical and psychic displacement. The poet desires the countrified well-being rather than the convoluted life in the city. The poet implies that an alternative to the uprooted exile or prodigal is a return in humbleness and repentance to the original source being. The first stanza of the poem begins with this note. Okigbo values the traditional African religious philosophy and practices. It is evident in his invocation to Idoto, the Igbo pantheon of gods and goddesses through the lines:

**"BEFORE YOU, my mother Idoto,
Naked I stand;
Before your weary presence,
A prodigal
Leaning on an oilbean,
Lost in your legend
Under your power wait I
On barefoot,
Watchman for the watchword
At heavensgate;"**

The invocation of Idoto is rooted in the Igbo cosmology. The 'watery presence' conjoins the physical and the supernatural alluding to water and spirit. The mother principle which is at the heart of traditional African philosophy and culture is embedded in the invocation to Idoto, which is contrary to the more distinct patriarchal basis of European and Western culture. The matriarchal system is the basis of social organisation in Egypt and Black Africa. The second-order devaluation of place and woman is the minimalist effect of colonialism. But the poetry of Okibo reflects national and regional consciousness.

The poet bestows the speaking persona with the attitude of a suppliant before an altar. The suppliant seeks enlightenment. The individual insight is yoked with religious observance – both Christian and traditional. The speaking persona is humble and offers oblation. He is also prepared to receive the responses, which the deity may grant. The word “prodigal” biblically alludes to a figure in a parable of Jesus (Luke 15:11–32). The prodigal is a wayward son who squanders his inheritance but returns home to find that his father forgives him. The first stanza of the poem echoes the proclamation made by Okibo in 1965 that writing of poetry was a religious act and the role of a poet was priestly. Each poem written by Okibo was a sacrifice offered at the altar of Idoto.

At the beginning, the speaking persona of the poem finds himself before the ‘watery presence’ of Idoto. He is naked, a supplicant, offering himself as a sacrifice to his own poetic impulse. The poet is prepared to suffer creation. The rainbow or the covenant “rain and sun in single combat” is perceived as a snake, capable of both leading and devouring the poet. The rainbow or the snake is an embodiment of good and evil. The image of the dark water alludes to creation and the period of gloom (colonisation in general and the degeneration of Nigeria under military despotism).

The speaker moves on to another place of entrance, namely the crossroads in Africa. A queue of worshippers wait before the doors of a church and listen to “old lovely fragments’ of pipe-organ music. He finds

“ From there the scene flashes to another place of entrance or choice, a crossroads in Africa, where a queue of worshippers waits before the doors of a church from which come ‘old lovely fragments’ of pipe-organ music.”

The charm and the elegance of the music is conveyed visually in the lines “ strains of pressed orange leaves on pages”. The word Anan refers to Okibo’s mother Anna who died in the year 1935. The music played in the church echoes in the cornfield.

The title of the poem “ Passage” connotes religious experience in toe with the phrase “ the moment of rose-garden” of the English poet T.S.Eliot. The ‘passage’ is a moment, when human limitation is flushed into clarity. In the words of the critic Dathorne, “ Okibo’s poems are narrating the progress towards nirvana.”

Short Questions

1. Why does Christopher Okibo call himself a prodigal?
2. What is the biblical allusion to the word ‘prodigal’?
3. Why does the speaker persona of the poem “ Passage” wait barefooted?
4. What is the fire dreamed of by Christopher Okibo?
5. What is the significance of the ‘dark waters’ in the poem “Passage.”?
6. What does the dark waters foreshadow the fire that is dreamt of?
7. Why does the poet long for silence in the poem “ Passage.”?

INTRODUCTION TO LORNA GOODISON AND THE POEM I AM BECOMING A MOTHER



Lorna Goodison is a Jamaican writer and artist. Lorna Goodison has been described as a poet whose work has been shaped by a literary tradition that reflects certain customary European roles and representations....but [which] also reflects some central aspects of the experience of West Indian women

The poet Lorna Goodison interweaves the Jamaican vernacular with that of the standard English. The predominant concern of her poetry is with the experience of womanhood- woman as daughter, sister, mother, matriarch, leader, fighter, sustainer, lover, sufferer and victim of male abuse. The anthology of poems titled *I am Becoming My Mother* was published in the year 1986. The collection is dedicated to the poet's son Miles. Of the thirty poems in the anthology, sixteen of them are concerned with women and women's matter. The primary focus is on what women have done and what they have been prevented from doing.

Lorna Goodison's poem "I am Becoming my Mother" is about a woman's sense of identity through attachment and bonding with the mother in particular and female line of ancestry in general. The awareness is delineated as a process of becoming. It is through the process of becoming that the poet persona comes into full being- becoming herself. The process of birth is physical and psychic. The process of becoming or birthing is dual- "My mother is now me" – the mother is growing into the daughter, just as the daughter is growing into the mother. The poet becomes her mother with a note of affirmation.

Elaine Showalter, the feminist critic had observed that women's writing prior to 1970's dealt with matrophobia or the fear of becoming one's mother. The female writing of the 1970's went beyond matrophobia and dealt with the quest for the mother like Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Lisa Alther's *Kinflicks*.

SUMMARY OF THE POEM I AM BECOMING MY MOTHER

**Yellow/brown woman
Fingers smelling always of onions
My mother raises rare blooms
and waters them with tea
her birth waters sang like rivers
my mother is now me.
My mother had a linen dress
the colour of the sky
and stored lace and damask
tablecloths
to pull shame out of her eye.
I am becoming my mother
brown/yellow woman
fingers smelling always of onions.**

Glossary

1. Birthwater- amniotic fluid – the liquid that surrounds an embryo (= growing baby) inside its mother
2. Linen-cloth made of flaxplant.
3. Damask- a type of heavy cloth that has a pattern woven into it that is the same colour as the cloth

Explanation

Stanza 1

The poem *I am Becoming my Mother* begins with the poet Lorna Goodison describing her mother as “yellow/ brown woman” engaged in domestic chores of cooking and nurturing plants and children. The poet has grown to become her ‘mother.’ It is through the process of becoming that the poet persona comes into full being- becoming herself. The process of birth is physical and psychic. The process of becoming or birthing is dual- “My mother is now me” – the mother is growing into the daughter, just as the daughter is growing into the mother. The poet becomes her mother with a note of affirmation. The import of becoming is to create or produce oneself. The poem celebrates the inheritance of woman as an artist. The metaphor of giving birth connotes artistic creativity. The idea of giving birth is described in terms of “birth waters” suggestive of fertility / creativity (water) and continuity (flowing). The birth waters are joyous and re-vitalising. The mother is also portrayed as an artist for she raises rare bloom and creates damasked table cloth.

Essay on Lorna Goodison’s poem I am Becoming My Mother

The poet Lorna Goodison interweaves the Jamaican vernacular with that of the standard English. The predominant concern of her poetry is with the experience of womanhood- woman as daughter, sister, mother, matriarch, leader, fighter, sustainer, lover, sufferer and victim of male abuse. The anthology of poems titled *I am Becoming My Mother* was published in the year 1986. The collection is dedicated to the poet’s son Miles. Of the thirty poems in the anthology, sixteen of them are concerned with women and women’s matter. The primary focus is on what women have done and what they have been prevented from doing.

Lorna Goodison’s poem “I am Becoming my Mother” is about a woman’s sense of identity through attachment and bonding with the mother in particular and female line of ancestry in general. The awareness is delineated as a process of becoming. It is through the process of becoming that the poet persona comes into full being- becoming herself. The process of birth is physical and psychic. The process of becoming or birthing is dual- “My mother is now me” – the mother is growing into the daughter, just as the daughter is growing into the mother. The poet becomes her mother with a note of affirmation.

The poem *I am Becoming my Mother* begins with the poet Lorna Goodison describing her mother as “yellow/ brown woman” engaged in domestic chores of cooking and nurturing plants and children. The poet has grown to become her ‘mother.’ It is through the process of becoming that the poet persona comes into full being- becoming herself. The process of birth is physical and psychic. The process of becoming or birthing is dual- “My mother is now me” – the mother is growing into the daughter, just as the daughter is growing into the mother. The poet becomes her mother with a note of affirmation. The import of becoming is to create or produce oneself. In the conventional androcentric tradition of the bildungsroman, the hero embarks on a quest to assert himself, resists temptation, in search of only the best. A woman is denied the privileged niche of selfhood. A woman finds herself in a world, where the sense of identity is imposed and determined by the patriarchal and hegemonic consciousness. A woman is the created and not the creator. The feminist turn in the literary arena proclaimed that a woman had to invent herself anew or to give birth to herself.

The idea of giving birth is described in the active terms of "birth waters," which suggest not only fertility/creativity (water) but also continuity (flowing), and these birth waters are a joyous, beautiful, vitalizing utterance — "her birth waters sang like river." The mother is also represented as an artist in that she "raises rare blooms." Goodison, like Alice Walker, has also discovered her mother's

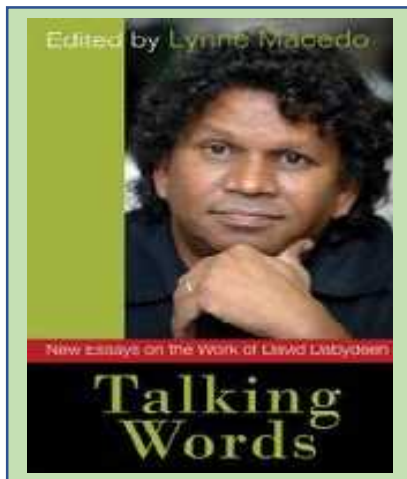
garden. The mother's garden in the poem "I am Becoming my Mother" is identified with beautiful works of art, albeit domestic, her "linen dress / the colour of the sky" and her "lace and damask / tablecloths." At the end, the poet has become her own mother, it is she who now "raises rare blooms" (her poems); it is her work which sings like rivers.

Elaine Showalter, the feminist critic had observed that women's writing prior to 1970's dealt with matrophobia or the fear of becoming one's mother. The female writing of the 1970's went beyond matrophobia and dealt with the quest for the mother like Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Lisa Alther's *Kinflicks*.

Short Questions

1. What is the titular significance of the poem "I am Becoming my Mother"?
2. What is the significance of the metaphor of "giving birth"?
3. How does the poet represent the mother as an artist?
4. What is the significance of the line "my mother is now me."?
5. What is the significance of 'becoming.'?

INTRODUCTION TO DAVID DABYDEEN'S POEM CATCHING CRABS



A novelist, poet and critic - first book, *Slave Song* (1984), a collection of poetry, won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the Quiller-Couch Prize-*Turner: New and Selected Poems*, was published in 1994-literary oeuvre includes-*The Intended* (1991), *Disappearance* (1993)-*The Counting House* (1996), *Our Lady of Demerara*(2004), *Molly and the Muslim Stick* (2009) and *Johnson's Dictionary* (2013)

David Dabydeen, the Anglo- Guyanese poet and novelist, writes poems that belongs to " a literature in broken English." He restored the visibility of black presence in English writing and art. In an essay titled " On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today," David Dabydeen structured his poems in nonconformist tradition. The established structures are disrupted and the ' standard English' is misused by the third world intellectuals . Writing in the coloniser's language is a continuity of the imperialist legacy. To quote David Dabydeen:

" I cannot... feel or write poetry hke a white man, much less serve him ... I feel that I am different, not wholly, but sufficient for me to want to contemplate that which is other in me, which owes its life to particular rituals of ancestry."

The poem *Catching Crab* gives an account of the poet's childhood memory in colonial Guyana.

SUMMARY OF THE POEM CATCHING CRABS

STANZA 1

Ruby and me stalking savannah
Crab season with cutlass and sack
like big folk.
Hiding behind stones or clumps of
bush
Crabs locked knee-deep in mud
mating
And Ruby, seven years old feeling
strange at the sex
And me horrified to pick them up
Plunge them into the darkness of bag

STANZA 2

So all day we scout to catch the lonesome ones
Who don't mind cooking because they got no
prospect
Of family, and squelching through the mud,
Cutlass clearing bush at our feet,
We come home tired slow, weighed down with plenty
Which Ma throw live into boiling pot piece-piece.
Tonight we'll have one big happy curry feed,
We'll test out who teeth and jaw strongest
Who will grow up to be the biggest
Or who will make most terrible cannibal

STANZA 3

We leave behind a mess of bones and shell
And come to England and America
Where Ruby hustles in a New York tenement
And me writing poetry at Cambridge,
Death long catch Ma, the house boarded up
Breeding wasps, woodlice in its dark-sack belly:
I am afraid to walk through weed yard,
Reach the door, prise open, look,
In case the pot still bubbles magical
On the fireside, and I see Ma
Working a ladle, slow

Explanation

Stanza 1

The first stanza of the poem gives an account of the poet's childhood experience in Guyana. The poet cum narrator stalks the crabs hidden in the bush along with his seven year old sister Ruby. Fear overtakes the stalkers, in capturing the crabs breeding.

Stanza 2

The poet along with his seven year old sister Ruby captures the crab and takes it home. The children eagerly wait for the mother to cook the crabs. They vie and compete with one another for crustacean gastronomic delight.

Stanza 3

The children grow up to leave their mother behind. The narrator's sister leaves for New York and the narrator settles in Cambridge for writing poetry. The narrator imagines a return to the family home years after leaving it. Change has occurred. The audacious gallantry in capturing crabs as a child has changed in to cowardice. The narrator feels intrepid to wade through the weed yard. The poem ends with a wistful imaginative presence of the "Ma working a ladle, slow."

Glossary

1. **Stalking**- the act of following a person or animal as closely as possible without being seen or heard.
2. **Savannah**- a large, flat area of land covered with grass, usually with few trees, that is found in hot countries, especially in Africa.
3. **Cutlass**- a curved sword with a single sharp edge, especially as used in the past by pirates.
4. **Folk**- people, especially those of a particular group or type/ used when speaking informally to a group of people.
5. **Clumps**- a group, especially of trees or flowers.
6. **Scout**- to go to look in various places for something you want.
7. **Lonesome**- lonely, feeling sad and unhappy.
8. **Squelching**- to quickly end something that is causing you problems
9. **Curry**- a dish, originally from South Asia, consisting of meat or vegetables cooked in a spicy sauce
10. **Cannibal**- a person who eats human flesh, an animal that eats the flesh of animals of its own type
11. **Hustles**- to make someone move quickly by pushing or pulling them along
12. **Tenement**- a large building divided into apartments, usually in a poor area of a city
13. **Wasp**- a flying insect, often black and yellow, that can sting
14. **Woodlice**- a small, dark grey creature with a hard outer shell, found under stones or in slightly wet soil
15. **Weedyard**- any wild plant that grows in an unwanted place/ an area of land
16. **Prise Open**- To use force to lift something off something else
17. **Ladle**- a very big spoon with a long handle and a deep cup-shaped part, used especially for serving soup
18. **Crustacean**- any of various types of animal that live in water and have a hard outer shell

Essay on David Dabydeen's Catching Crabs

David Dabydeen is Guyana born writer settled in England. He established his reputation as a creative writer with the books *Slave Song* (1984), *Coolie Odyssey and Turner : New and Selected Poems* (1994). He evokes the Caribbean experience as a Diaspora experience, a movement between India and Guyana, Guyana and England.

David Dabydeen, the Anglo- Guyanese writes poems that belongs to “ a literature in broken English.” He restored the visibility of black presence in English writing and art. In an essay titled “ On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today,” David Dabydeen states that he structured his poems in nonconformist tradition. The established structures are disrupted and the ‘ standard English’ is misused by the third world intellectuals . Writing in the coloniser’s language is a continuity of the imperialist legacy. To quote David Dabydeen:

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The poem *Catching Crab* gives an account of the poet’s childhood memory in colonial Guyana. The first stanza of the poem gives an account of the poet’s childhood experience in Guyana :

**“Ruby and me stalking savannah
Crab season with cutlass and sack like big folk.”**

The poet cum narrator stalks the crabs hidden in the bush along with his seven year old sister Ruby. Fear overtakes the stalkers, in capturing the crabs breeding. The poet along with his seven year old sister Ruby captures the crab and takes it home. The children eagerly wait for the mother to cook the crabs. They vie and compete with one another for crustacean gastronomic delight.

The children grow up to leave their mother behind. The narrator's sister leaves for New York and the narrator settles in Cambridge for writing poetry. The narrator imagines a return to the family home years after leaving it. Change has occurred. The audacious gallantry in capturing crabs as a child has changed in to cowardice. The narrator feels intrepid to wade through the weed yard. The poem ends with a wistful imaginative presence of the "Ma working a ladle, slow."

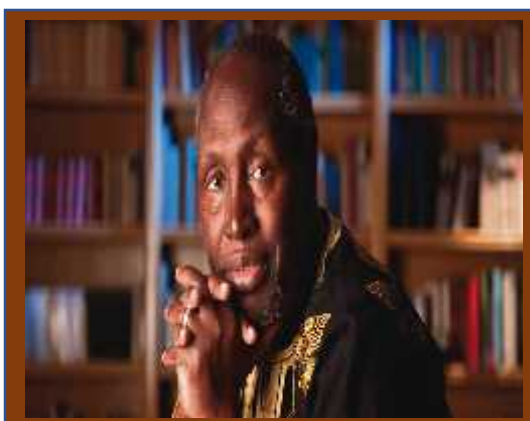
David Dabydeen uses unrhymed lines with feminine endings – "big folk" and 'piece-piece". The poem circles between children's scare-stories and colonial cliches "who will make most terrible cannibal." The word "Ma" connotes guilt and pain of leaving behind a lonely mother.

The lines "the lonesome ones / who don't mind cooking because they got no prospect / of family", "we will test out who teeth and jaw strongest", "we leave behind a mess of bones and shell / and come to England and America" refer implicitly to colonial onslaught and outrage.

Short Questions

1. Why did Ruby and the narrator stalk savannah?
2. What did Ruby and the narrator see behind stones?
3. Why was the narrator horrified at picking up the crab?
4. Why is Ruby and the narrator weighed down?
5. Why did Ruby and the narrator choose to catch the lonesome crabs?
6. Why did Ruby and the narrator catch the crabs?
7. Where did Ruby and the narrator leave for?
8. Why does the narrator fear to walk through the weed yard?

INTRODUCTION TO NGUGI WA THIONG'O



Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan writer and academic who writes primarily in Gikuyu.

The literary oeuvre of Ngugi wa Thiong'o includes novels titled *Weep Not, Child*, (1964) *The River Between*, (1965) *A Grain of Wheat*, (1967, 1992), *Petals of Blood* (1977) *Caitani Mutharaba-Ini* (*Devil on the Cross*, 1980) / short stories titled- *A Meeting in the Dark* (1974) *Secret Lives*, and *Other Stories*, (1976, 1992) / plays titled- *The Black Hermit* (1963), *I Will Marry You When I Want* (1992) / Essays titled - *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture, and Politics* (1972) *Writers in Politics: Essays* (1981) *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural*

Freedom (1993) *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: The Performance of Literature and Power in Post-Colonial Africa* (The Clarendon Lectures in English Literature 1996), Oxford University Press, 1998.

In the year 1977, Ngugi decided to turn to the Gikuyu language in fiction and drama. "I believe," he explains in *Decolonising the Mind*, "that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples" (28). The controversy about what language to write dominated the African literary circle in the 1960s and before. Franz Fanon investigated the problem as early as the 1959 Congress of Black African Writers at Rome and in "The African Writer and the English Language".

Thiongo invoked the concept of orature, in his essay "Okot p'Bitek and Writing in East Africa" in *Homecoming*, where his all but primary topic is the close functional tie between the artist's verbal act and the immediate, ongoing life of the community. Thiongo notes that language, is "inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world". Language has been, a predominant weapon in the colonialist subversion of the African mind and personality. The imposition of English in Kenya deformed and distorted the way in which Kenyans construed and constructed the world.

Deprived of a native language, the African writer is deracinated and decultured. The coercion to write in the imperialist's language makes the African writer gripped into the imperialist's culture. The debate over the choice of language has been fulminating in Africa for decades. The linguistic displacement is yoked to cultural displacement. The postcolonial writers like Ngugi and Gabriel Okara raise the question of whether language constructs culture or is constructed by it.

SUMMARY OF THE ESSAY AFRICAN LITERATURE SAYS... WHO

Context and purpose

The interview between Charles Cantalupo and Ngugi wa Thiongo took place on April 24, 2015 as a part of the Warscapes Public Lecture Series. Ngugi wa Thiongo, a long-time advocate for the use of African languages within African literature, explains his notion of the Europhone tradition, literary identity theft, and the ways one might conceive of the progress that has been made by Africans to reckon with the cultural aftermath of imperialism.

The essay begins with Charles Cantalupo quoting a passage from Thiongo's essay *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (2009):

"I always remember how, upon learning how to read in English, my classmates and I would carry the English-language Bible to church. The service was entirely in Gĩkuĩyũ. Everybody else had the Gĩkuĩyũ-language Bible. The preacher read passages from the Gĩkuĩyũ-language Bible. But we who had been to school would follow him through our English text. The Gĩkuĩyũ voice had to come to us in English sounds. . . . This was to become the practice in African writing as well . . ."

Ngugi's purpose to renounce the English language

In the year 1970, Ngugi gave up the English language to commit himself to writing in African languages. His primary concern was the critical importance of language to culture. In the book titled *Something Torn and New*, Ngugi explored Africa's historical, economic and cultural fragmentation by slavery, colonialism and globalization. **Europheonism, namely the replacement of native names, languages and identities with European ones' was an irrepressible force that characterised the imperialised history.** The consequence of imperialism was the dismemberment of the African memory. Africa had unjustly suffered oppression by the West. African languages were replaced with the European ones. Ngugi defined language "as a communication system and carrier

of culture by virtue of being simultaneously the means and carrier of memory”(p.20). Suppression of African language, had led to the dismemberment of Africa from its past. Thiongo advocates the need for a remembrance of African languages in order to reconnect with African memory and restore African wholeness.

Thiongo on Gikuyu Voice

Gikuyu voice is the voice given to Thiongo by his mother. The other voice namely the ‘conquering sound’ is that of the colonial. After the colonisation of Africa, Thiongo regained his ‘voice’ that was swaddled in English sounds or rather the voice given to him by his mother was buried under the English sounds. The voice that was given to him by his mother was heard through English. The voice given to him by his mother was oral. All the languages are oral. The literary artist always mimicked the oral. Thiongo learnt about the ‘voice’ through stories narrated to him by the fireside at night. The stories narrated during the night time disappeared in the day. At the end of the chores of the day, the stories came back in the night. Thiongo’s mother did not know to read or write. But she dreamt of an education for her son Thiongo. She supervised the homework done by Thiongo. She always wanted the best for her son. This attitude of the mother became a constant refrain and an aspiration for Thiongo and he learned to read and write in the Gikuyu language.

Thiongo had to depend on his mother to listen to the stories in the Gikuyu language, since he did not know the language. The mother would narrate stories in the Gikuyu language after the days chore. Now that Thiongo had learned to read and write in the Gikuyu language, he could narrate stories to himself regardless of the time of the day. He thanked his mother for inspiring him to learn the Gikuyu language. He read stories in the Gikuyu translation of the Bible, the Old Testament. He remembers his mother when he listens to the song” Amazing Grace” and the line” I once was blind, but now I see”, since he learnt the language through the efforts of his mother. The first novel written by Thiongo namely *Weep Not, Child* (1964) was written in the English language. The novel is about his own life, but it was not written in the Gikuyu language. The quotation cited from his book *Something Torn and New* was about this contradiction. Instead of accepting the fact that Gikuyu was a good language, the African novelists ‘feigned foreign.’

Thiongo on Europhone African Literature

Europhone African Literature is a literature written by Africans but in European tongues. The novels like *Weep Not, Child, The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977)and memoirs and literary/ critical theory written by Thiongo is part of the Europhone tradition.

There is another tradition that is deep found in Africa in African languages like Geez, Amharic, Hausa, Kiswahili, Luganda, IsiZulu and isixhosa, Shona, Yoruba. The voice of these African languages had been muffled. The identity of these languages were stolen. All the African intellectuals and writers spoke about ‘ identity theft’. Thiongo wanted to probe into the literary identity theft. Europhone African literature had stolen the identity of African literature. The Europhone African Literature wore the mask of African literature. The Europhone African literature was an example of literary identity theft.

Thiongo on Minority tradition

The tradition of African literature in English, French and Portuguese or in Europhone or colonial languages is a minority tradition. The Europhone literature had no right in usurping the African literature. In the years to come, the Europhone literature would be in the footnotes (**a note printed at the bottom of a page that gives extra information about something that has been written on that page/ an event, subject, or detail that is not important**).

Thiongo's comment on the "footnotes" reminds Cantalupo of the current status of poems written in the Latin language during the European Renaissance or Early Modern Era (**the period of new growth of interest and activity in the areas of art, literature, and ideas in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries**). The poems written in Latin is read by none. Cantalupo wants to know whether Thiongo was forecasting a time when literature written by African writers in the colonial language would also have the same fate as that of the Latin poems. He also wants to know the fate of European vernacular writers like Petrarch, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, Rabelais, Montaigne, Cervantes. Thiongo had praised African literature in European languages. At the same time, he also advocates the translation of European African literature into African languages.

Cantalupo quotes a passage from Thiongo's collection of essays titled *In the Name of the Mother* (2013):

"African literature in European languages is the nearest thing we have to Pan-African common literary inheritance. . . . They have . . . enabled a dialogue between Africans of the continent and the diaspora. In short, they belong to the continent as much as to the nations of their origin. You have only to see the reverence with which African writers are held in every part of the continent to realize the validity of the claim. I can testify to that. I have been stopped in the streets of Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria, by people who have never seen me before to say what my books have meant to them... "Take any major African writers, say Ama Ata Aidoo or . . . Wole Soyinka. If you travel anywhere in Africa, be it Zimbabwe, South African, Kenya or wherever, people . . . do not say, 'This is a Ghanaian writer' or 'That is a Nigerian writer.' They rather see them as African writers wherever they go." Isn't this a conundrum? Isn't such recognition the result of their works primarily being known in European languages that themselves are pan-African, in many cases even more than African languages themselves?"

Cantalupo questions the distinction between African language Literature and Europhone literature.

Thiongo on Literary identity theft

By using the term literary identity theft, Thiongo does not intend to demean the quality of work produced in European languages or the work produced by members of his generation, who learnt English many years later after speaking African languages. The writers belonging to latter generation chose to write in English since in reality their mother tongue was English. The parents would have brought them up as English-speaking children.

The question of literary identity theft is not peculiar to Africa. Thiongo cites the examples of two Irish writers James Joyce and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. James Joyce is a well-known Irish writer, a polyglot, who could speak Greek, Latin, Italian and Japanese. James Joyce lived in Italy for some time and wrote for Italian newspapers in the Italian language and got them published. The English translation of one of his Italian articles is "Ireland at the Bar". It recounts the story of an Irish man who is arrested and accused of murder but who only speaks Gaelic and not English. The trial **(the hearing of statements and showing of objects in a law court to judge, if a person is guilty of a crime or to decide a case or a legal matter)** is in English and the answer given by the Irish man is translated into English as "No, your honor." As a result, he is found guilty and hanged. Joyce could see the problematic relation between the Gaelic or Irish and the English language. But he wanted to be seen as an European novelist rather than Irish. Joyce did not consider Ireland as part of Europe and chose to write in English. Joyce belongs to the tradition of Europhone or Anglophone literature. In the novel titled *Finnegan's Wake* published in 1939, Joyce smuggles Gaelic words and expressions into the narrative. This technique contributes for the benefit of English language or readers but seldom does anything to the Gaelic language of Ireland.

On the contrary, the contemporary Irish writer Nuala Ni Dhoornhail who can speak and read in Turkish, French and German chose to write only in Irish. **“why do you write in Irish? If so much of what is written in English is called Irish literature, she responds, what do I call the literature actually written in Irish by the Irish?”** In the essay titled *Why I Choose to Write in Irish: the Corpse that Sits Up and Talks Back* published in 1995, Dhoornhail states that she will not sit idly by and let the identity of Irish literature be stolen.

Thiongo observes that advances in technology have made stolen identities possible. Stealing of identity is a serious crime that affects nation and people. (**stealing of personal identity- someone can access one’s bank account**). Literary identity theft is as serious as stolen identity.

Cantalupo had discussed James Joyce in his first interview with Thiongo in 1993. Cantalupo’s contention that English language was the home land of James Joyce was refuted by Thiongo. Thiongo observed that languages were a matter of social communities. Thiongo insisted on the connection between suppression of a language by economic or military means and its effect on the individual. Thiongo was sceptical about the existence of a language that had no community of speakers. Cantalupo replied that Joyce worked towards a language of no one’s world- a lonely solace. Thiongo countered Cantalupo by relating the colonial history of Ireland to that of England and the West. Thiongo believed that Ireland’s colonial history was an Irish reality seldom considered by James Joyce. James Joyce lived in exile and never returned to Ireland or the Irish language. Cantalupo questions Thiongo on his condition of being in exile

Thiongo replies that James Joyce chose to be an exile. James Joyce wanted to be a European. Thiongo could not understand Joyce’s desire to be an European, since Ireland is an integral part of Europe. The Europe with which James Joyce identified himself was the Europe of the empire, the Europe that colonized Africa and Ireland. Thiongo is not judgemental about the quality or genius of James Joyce. Thiongo objects to the linguistic choice made by James Joyce. Joyce ran away from his Irish self. The English novels of James Joyce longed for the Irish, he chose to run away from.

It is a natural tendency to want back what was stolen. In the conference held in Eritrea in 2000 titled *Against All Odds*, Thiongo delivered a lecture titled “ Decolonizing the mind - -- are we there yet?” In the lecture, Thiongo referred to the Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literature. The conference examined the state of African languages in literature, scholarship, publishing, education, and administration in Africa and throughout the world. The vitality of African languages and literatures was celebrated and their potential affirmed. The participants of the conference noted with pride that despite all the odds against them, African languages as vehicles of communication and knowledge survived. Colonialism created some of the most serious obstacles against African languages and literatures. They noted with concern the fact that these colonial obstacles still haunt independent Africa and continue to block the mind of the continent. They asserted that Africa must firmly reject this incongruity and affirm a new beginning by returning to its languages and heritage. They declared that :

1. African languages must take on the duty, the responsibility, and the challenge of speaking for the continent.
2. The vitality and equality of African languages must be recognized as a basis for the future empowerment of African peoples.
3. The diversity of African languages reflects the rich cultural heritage of Africa and must be used as an instrument of African unity.

Cantalupo points out the emphasis on the struggle of African languages. Cantalupo refers to a conference attended by him at Kenyatta University. A young scholar asked the African language scholars “ Have any of you ever been colonised?” They roared in response as “ No”. The scholarship in African language literature is vast that people living in United States of America and

Europe are unaware of. Thus, the study of African languages and Literature in Africa is different from the study of African Languages and Literature in United States of America. He also refers to the journal *Mutiri by Thiongo in Gikuyu language*. Technological advancement in form of African language apps for cell phones facilitate the use of African language. There is absolutely no alarm of stolen identity of African language.

Thiongo on the role of the English language

Thiongo affirms that as a writer he is not against the English language. He likes all languages and learnt the language Espanol on you tube. Thiongo is learning French/ Chinese and other languages. His visit to Wales made him want someone to teach him Welch so that he could read the road signs. Thiongo values all languages. What has become an anathema to him, is the **hierarchy of languages**. All languages are capable of expressing the highest beauty. Instead of languages in hierarchy, languages should relate to one another in a network of give and take. There is no such thing as big or small language. There is a difference between network and a hierarchy. Hierarchy(**a system in which people or things are put at various levels or ranks according to their importance**) is a question of power. Network(**a large system consisting of many similar parts that are connected together to allow movement or communication between or along the parts, or between the parts and a control centre**) is a question of give and take.

In Africa, there has been a tradition of writing in African languages. The translation of Thomas Mofolo, is considered to be the greatest. Mofolo wrote mostly in the Sesotho language. Basotho are ethnic group of people in Southern Africa. *Chaka* by Thomas Mofolo was published in 1925. It is a mythic retelling of the story of the rise and fall of the Zulu emperor-king Shaka. Léopold Sédar Senghor was influenced by Mofolo. Senghor is an African socialist and major theoretician of the Negritude movement. Kiswahili is a language spoken in East and Central Africa. It has a developed literary history but its very identity as an African literature is buried under the other identity of European literature. Europhonicity has become Africanity. Thiongo questions about the Africanity of Kiswahili, Yoruba (Western Africa) and Zulu (Southern Africa) languages.

Thiongo on Europhone African Literature

The term Europhone African Literature has a negative connotation. It is a description of the cultural aftermath of imperialism. There are Asian Europhone Literature and Pacific Europhone Literature. The Europhone tradition has its own identity. Thiongo objects to the African literature taking on the identity of the other. Europhone tradition demands that literature in African language beg for recognition. Europhonicity has become a reality now. Europhone African literature is a name for writing by Africans in European languages. Europhone African Literature is part of the world wide Europhone literature.

Thiongo notes that as an editor of the journal Mutiiri in the Gikuyu language, he has begun to write novels only in the Gikuyu language. The Asmara declaration in African languages and literature serves as an encouragement for African writers to write in the African languages. But consistent encouragement and motivation to write in African languages is beset with obstacle. The objective of African literary prize is to promote African literature but it is given to African literature that is not written in any of the African languages. The governments in Africa and other financial institutions like the world bank ensure the dominance of European languages in the field of education, intellectual and literary production.

Thiongo on English translation of African texts

Funding was received from the World Bank to host a conference held in Eritrea on African Languages and Literature. The play *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977) written in English by Thiongo was translated into the African language Tigrinya. The organisers of the conference could not find a speaker of the Gikuyu language in order to translate the original text into the Tigrinya language and so they had to use the English translation. Thiongo makes it clear that he is not against the books available in English or French. He believes and appreciates translations. He has translated Moliere into the Gikuyu language. Thiongo's emphasis in African language literature as an organizing principle to teach literature from Africa has enabled him to appreciate Shakespeare more than he used to do earlier because he is able to link Shakespeare's work to Africa more meaningfully.

The European languages like English, French, German and Spanish went through the same plight as that of African languages. The desire expressed by people to translate or write in English, namely the translation of the Bible into English or the translation of medical terms was discouraged. The French language also met with the same discouragement. Descartes explained in detail that he preferred to write his philosophic discourse in the French language than in Latin. In the year 1536, William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into English. Thiongo was impressed by Dante. Dante was advised by his friends not to write in the Tuscan language instead of Latin, in order to retain literary immortality. He wrote a reply in Latin comparing the Tuscan vernacular to a female sheep (ewe) whose udder is full of milk. "You can write in Latin, but I want to milk this richness," he said. But he wrote it in perfect Latin to show, "I can write in Latin if I want to, but I'm choosing to write in Tuscan." Thiongo liked translations because they made languages to communicate with each other.

African Language Translation

Cantalupo states that knowledge of literature depends on translation. No one can know literature without translation. People, who read or have read Dante seldom read his works in the Italian language. The Bible has been translated into several languages. The readers of the Bible seldom read it in actual biblical languages like Hebrew, or later translations, long-standing translations like the Septuagint Koine Greek or the Vulgate in Latin. Cantalupo is keen to know why there aren't more African language translations. As a non-native speaker, he wanted more translations of African language literature. The literature written in Gĩkuĩyũ, Swahili, Tigrinya— have to be translated in order to gain wider audience and appreciation. There is plenty of focus on the problems of Africa, but the translation of African language literature is a huge problem, too. Along with the problems like globalization, dictatorship, democracy, fundamentalism, economies, immigration, Ebola, war, rights, reparations, lack of African language literary translation is a problem too. The unending emphasis on Africa's political and social problems are cited as the reason for not going ahead with translation of African literary texts. African language translation must succeed like the translations of other languages, ancient or modern. African language texts must be translated and read. Cantalupo wants to know the reason for few translations of African language literary texts.

Thiongo on the paucity of African Language Translation

Thiongo states that African countries have to change their own policies about African languages first. A linguistic environment must be created. But for Tanzania, there are very few countries where investments are made in African languages. Thiongo narrates his personal experience in the year 2014 when he was to be conferred with ninth honorary doctorate by the University of Dares Dallah in Kenya. He was asked to deliver a lecture. Thiongo pondered in what language would he accept the doctorate. He was advised by his friends to give a public lecture. Kiswahili is the language

spoken in Kenya. Thiongo asked himself whether he was going to deliver a lecture in English to the Kiswahili speaking nation, namely Kenya. He wrote a speech in English titled “Language and Metaphysical Empire”. He got his speech translated by Abdilatif Abdalla, a native speaker of Kiswahili and one of the leading Swahili poets in the world. Thiongo informs his hosts that he would speak in Kiswahili. He sensed the surprise of his audience since they assumed that he would speak in English. Professor Penina Mhando introduced Thiongo in Kiswahili. Thiongo cherished this as a beautiful moment in his life. Though he can read and write in Kiswahili, he is not confident of writing an academic paper in Kiswahili. He responded to the question session in Kiswahili. Thiongo’s speech and response in Kiswahili became the talk of radio and television. Thiongo delivered his acceptance speech in Kiswahili. The entire degree-awarding ceremony was conducted in Kiswahili. All the names and titles of degrees—literature, engineering, chemistry, physics, medicine etc.—were read out in Kiswahili. Thiongo is seventy-seven years old and he has never been in a situation, where an entire academic discourse from beginning to end was conducted—without an apology—in an African language. Thiongo was moved by the event, since it confirmed what he believed – namely to speak in one’s language with pride. He accepted the tenth doctorate in Germany in Kiswahili.

Thiongo on Globalectics

Cantalupo quotes from the book *Globalectics: Theory and Politics of Knowing* (published in 2012) written by Thiongo. Thiongo refers to **“National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.”** The book by Thiongo advocates the readers to read literature for its global interconnectedness. Ngugi Thiongo coins a term **‘globalectics’ to refer to a method of reading that combines theories of globalisation and Hegelian dialectics . Thiongo imagines a new global literary space and rethinks the politics of knowing as a way out of what he calls “ the straight jackets of nationalism”.** **Globalectic reading paves way for a kind of reading, wherein the readers reach out for texts across time and space instead of responding to one’s own time and space.** (Hegel is a nineteenth century German philosopher. **“Dialectics” is a term used to describe a method of philosophical argument that involves some sort of contradictory process between opposing sides. The ancient Greek philosopher, Plato for instance, presented his philosophical argument as a back-and-forth dialogue or debate, generally between the character of Socrates, on one side, and some person or group of people to whom Socrates was talking (his interlocutors), on the other. In the course of the dialogues, Socrates’ interlocutors propose definitions of philosophical concepts or express views that Socrates challenges or opposes. The back-and-forth debate between opposing sides produces a kind of linear progression or evolution in philosophical views or positions: as the dialogues go along. Whereas Plato’s “opposing sides” were people (Socrates and his interlocutors), however, what the “opposing sides” are in Hegel’s work depends on the subject matter he discusses. It could be different definitions of a subject or topic.)**

Thiongo on translation

According to Thiongo, translation has to take place not only in theory but also in practice, provided the relationship between language and cultures is not a hierarchy but a network. Translation had played an important role in human civilization. Thiongo secured the knowledge of Russian literature and Greek theatre through English translation. He read the Bible that was translated into Gikuyu. Translation formed him both as a reader and as a writer. Translation within a network creates a basis of conversation among literatures and cultures of the world. Thiongo’s definition of **“globalectic imagination,”** is an expansion of the Blakean statement: “to see the world in a grain of sand; to see eternity in an hour”. The reading and organization of the teaching of literature can be done globalectically. **Globalectics** encourages conversation among languages, literatures, and cultures. At Nairobi University in 1961, Thiongo along with other academicians started to reorganize literature. They did not abandon English and English literature but only tried to organize literature

differently. They would position Caribbean literature, African American literature, Asian literature, Latin American literature at the centre and European literature would figure at the end. In Europe, European literature would be at the center, and African literature, Asian literature, and Latin American literature would follow suit in relation to it. In America, American literature, inclusive of Euro, Afro, Asian, Native American etc.—would be at the center. But within American Literature, Thiongo would place African-American and Native American at the center. Thiongo would position African American literature at the center of the study since African American literature was the only really new in American literature.

Thiongo on the centrality of African American literature

Thiongo reiterates that African American literature is at the heart of modern American literature and culture. America belonged to the Native Americans. All the others communities were newcomers to the continent. European people went there by choice. African people did not go there by choice. European people went to America as colonists and slave owners and their linguistic connection with Europe was never cut off. In fact, the connection to European cultures continued—sometimes in resistance to it, sometimes emulating it, but always within its framework. Native Americans were always in contact with their languages. Despite the oppression of Native Americans, they still had connectivity with their languages. It is only the African people who had their systematic connection with Africa denied during the period of colonisation.

The languages of Africa were banned on slave labour plantations. Many Africans were hanged for speaking in African languages in the slave labour plantations. Even the drum, the instrument of the African people was banned. So the Africans had to create new languages out of the imposed language of the master and the memories of the banned African languages. New languages emerged namely Ebonics, Creole etc. They are new languages, born out of the new environment that produced the spirituals, jazz, and the hip-hop. New culture and language were created in Africa, because colonisation forced them to invent new languages and cultural expressions of being. The situation of the Africans could be compared with that of the Europeans in America. The Europeans in America could still connect with cultures and literatures of the continent of their origins. In fact, for many American writers, going to Europe was mandatory. T. S. Eliot even migrated to England.

Thiongo on what constitutes African literature

Thiongo cites the postcolonial as the site of globality. There is no community, language or religion anywhere in the globe that has no presence in the United States of America. The American literature as much as its music and performance is not just European, it is also African, Asian and Pacific. From its origin, till the present, the United States has been a nation of immigrants or transnational (going beyond national boundaries). Many young writers in America who have first generation family links to Africa, but who were born, live and work in America, have received high literary and critical acclaim. These writers write in English and thereby enrich American culture. Likewise, lot of writers from Asia, India and China who have similar first generational links are now part of the canon of contemporary American literature- like Jhumpa Lahri or Ha Jin. Thiongo questions whether young African writers should also be thought of as American rather than African.

Thiongo cites as example his personal experience. If Thiongo could speak in English and not Gikuyu or Malayalam with his friend Meena Alexander (who speaks Malayalam), there is no point in pretending that they are speaking anything other than English. If Thiongo and Meena Alexander can write in English, they are part of the English language literature. They are part of the English language literature because of the language used despite belonging to Kenya or India. In order to be a part of African literature, an African writer should only write in African language. If Thiongo's friend Meena Alexander learns and starts writing her novels in Kiswahili, she becomes a part of Kiswahili writing culture and if Thiongo writes in Malayalam, then he is a part of Indian literature.

Thiongo cites another example related to his personal experience. He had a conversation with a woman at the City college. The woman spoke in Kiswahili, with good gesture and intonation. Thiongo assumed that the woman was a Swahili, who lived in America. Later he learnt that the woman was an American. Since the woman spoke Kiswahili, she was more a part of a Kiswahili culture and Kiswahili language tradition than Thiongo himself despite being born in Kenya. When James Joyce wrote in the English language, he was not writing Irish literature but contributed to the whole gamut of English literature. John Millington Synge invented his own Irish language, but he did not write in Gaelic. He wrote about how he thought in Irish but spoke in English. J.M Synge is part of English literature. African writers, who write in English, are part of English literature. An encyclopedia of British literature has listed Chinua Achebe as an English writer. African writer should write in African languages in order to be a part of African literature.

Essay on African literature says ... Who

Ngugi wa Thiongo is a Kenyan critic and novelist who primarily writes in the Gikuyu language. In the year 1977, Ngugi decided to turn to the Gikuyu language in fiction and drama. "I believe," he explains in *Decolonising the Mind*, "that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti- imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples" (28). The controversy about what language to write dominated the African literary circle in the 1960s and before. Franz Fanon investigated the problem in the article "The African writer and the English language" and in the Congress of Black African Writers at Rome in 1959.

Thiongo invoked the concept of orature, in his essay "Okot p'Bitek and Writing in East Africa". The primary concern of the essay is the close functional tie between the artist's verbal act and the immediate, ongoing life of the community. Thiongo notes that language, is "inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world". Language is a predominant weapon in the colonialist subversion of the African mind and personality. The imposition of English in Kenya deformed and distorted the way in which the Kenyans construed and constructed the world.

Deprived of a native language, the African writer is deracinated and decultured. The coercion to write in the imperialist's language makes the African writer gripped into the imperialist's culture. The debate over the choice of language has been fulminating in Africa for decades. The linguistic displacement is yoked to cultural displacement. The postcolonial writers like Ngugi and Gabriel Okara raise the question of whether language constructs culture or is constructed by it.

Europhonism, namely the replacement of native names, languages and identities with European ones' was an irrepressible force that characterised the imperialised history. The consequence of imperialism was the dismemberment of the African memory. Thiongo advocates the need for a remembrance of African languages to reconnect with African memory and restore African wholeness. Europhone African Literature is a literature written by Africans but in European tongues. The novels like *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977), and memoirs and literary/ critical theory written by Thiongo is part of Europhone tradition.

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The tradition of African literature in English, French and Portuguese or in Europhone or colonial languages is a minority tradition. Thiongo affirms that as a writer he is not against the English language. Thiongo vehemently opposed hierarchy of languages. All languages are capable of expressing the highest beauty. Languages should relate to one another in a network of give and take. Thiongo makes it clear that he is not against the books available in the English or French. He believes and appreciates translations. He has translated Moliere into the Gikuyu language.

Thiongo coins a term 'globalectics' to refer to a method of reading that combines theories of globalisation and Hegelian dialectics. Globalectic reading paves way for a kind of reading, wherein the readers reach out for texts across time and space instead of responding to one's own time and space. According to Thiongo, translation has to take place not only in theory but also in practice, provided the relationship between language and cultures is not a hierarchy but a network. Thiongo's definition of "globalectic imagination," is an expansion of the Blakean statement: "to see the world in a grain of sand; to see eternity in an hour. Globalectics encourages conversation among languages, literatures, and cultures.

Thiongo reiterates that African American literature is at the heart of modern American literature and culture. Thiongo cites the postcolonial as the site of globality. There is no community, language or religion anywhere in the globe that has no presence in the United States of America. The American literature as much as its music and performance is not just European, it is also African, Asian and Pacific. Literature written in African languages only constitute African literature.

Short Questions

1. Where did the interview between Charles Cantalupo and Ngugi wa Thiongo take place?
2. Who is Charles Cantalupo?
3. Why did Ngugi wa Thiongo give up writing in the English language in the 1970?
4. What was Thiongo's central concern in *Something Torn and New*?
5. Define the term Europhonism.
6. How did African memory suffer dismemberment?
7. How does Thiongo define language ?
8. How can a reconnection with African memory be established?
9. Why does Thiongo advocate the need for African language?
10. What does the voice of Gikuyu and 'conquering sound' denote?
11. How did Thiongo learn the Gikuyu language.?
12. What did Thiongo read first after learning the Gikuyu language?
13. Define the term Europhone African Literature.
14. Define Thiongo's notion of literary theft.
15. Define Thiongo's notion of minority tradition.
16. What does Thiongo's comment on 'footnotes' remind Cantalupo?
17. Why did James Joyce choose to write in the English language?
18. Why did Nuala Ni Dhoomshnail choose to write in the Irish language?
19. What does Asmara Declaration of African languages and literature signify?
20. Define Thiongo's notion of hierarchy of languages.
21. Define the term globalectics.

INTRODUCTION TO REGINALD MARTIN



Professor and critic of African American Literary Theory

SUMMARY OF REGINALD MARTIN'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERARY CRITICISM : AN INTRODUCTION

Reginald Martin outlines several historical events that occurred in literature and criticism written by black writers/ critics in the 1960's :

- (a) **Separatism** is an advocacy of a state of cultural, ethnic, tribal, religious, racial, governmental or gender separation from the larger group. The separatist group indulge in identity politics or political activity. The proponents of the separatist group are against integration with the dominant group since integration compromises their identity and forestalls ability to pursue self-reliance and self-determination.
- (b) **Black separatism** is a separatist political movement that seeks separate economic and cultural development for those of African descent in societies, particularly in the United States. It is a subcategory of black nationalism, that stems from the idea of racial solidarity. Black separatism emphasises that the black people should organize themselves based on their common experience of oppression and suppression, as a result of their colour, race, religion and African heritage. The black separatists seek their original cultural homeland. They believe that a society dominated by the Whites would hinder the progress of the Black.
- (c) **Difference and similarity between Black nationalism and Black separatism-** Black separatism and Black nationalism advocate the rights of the black people. Black separatist endorse the view that the Blacks should be physically and geographically separated from people of other races, in particular the Whites. They recommend and emphasise on a separate nation for the Blacks. On the contrary, Black nationalist do not advocate or recommend physical separation of the Blacks. All black separatists are black nationalists, but all black nationalists are not black separatists.
- (d) **Black nationalism** – It is a type of nationalism that emphasises on the distinctiveness of the blacks as a race. They advocate the empowerment of the black community at the socio-economic and political level. They focus on black pride, justice and identity.
- (e) **Identity politics**-Identity politics is a term that designates a political approach wherein people of a particular religion, race, social background, class or other identifying factor form exclusive socio-political alliances.
- (f) **Black power**-The Black Power movement is a social movement motivated by a desire and need for the safety and self-sufficiency of the black people in Africa.

The proponents of Black separatism shouted down the integrationist polemics that governed African American literary criticism of the 1940's and 1950's. Reginald Martin lists out many professors and journalists who worked during the late 40's and 1960's in collusion. The literary worth and merit of writers like Gwendolyn Brooks *Annie Allen* and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is unquestionable. But the black Nationalist/ literary separatists of the 1960s disrupted this kind of critical/comparative paradigm (***Annie Allen is a book of poetry by Gwendolyn Brooks that was published in 1949, and for which she received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1950. Gwendolyn Brook is the first African American to ever receive a Pulitzer Prize. The work comprising three parts is about an African-American girl, Annie, growing into womanhood. / T. S. Eliot's The Wasteland (1922) - central work of modernist poetry - Invisible Man is a novel by Ralph Ellison, published by Random House in 1952. It addresses many of the social and intellectual issues faced by the African Americans in the early twentieth century, including black nationalism, the relationship between black identity and Marxism - Portrait of the Artist as a young Man -1916 is the first novel of Irish writer James Joyce. A Künstlerroman written in a modernist style, it traces the religious and intellectual awakening of young Stephen Dedalus.***).

The separatists argue for an unique and distinct black way of judging and perceiving literature. This method of establishing the uniqueness and distinctiveness of black literary taste could not be put into operation, if writing by blacks is compared with that of the Whites. The blacks were oppressed by the Whites, and the black writers chose to write against this oppression and therefore a comparative paradigm is questionable for the Black separatists.

.Irony in the separatist movement in Black criticism (**irony** - the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect)

(a) Prominent writers like Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin advocated for universality (***the quality of involving or being shared by all people or things in the world or in a particular group***) in their respective writing. But some black writers emphasised on distinctiveness in their writing. But Hansberry and Baldwin saw no reason to give a wide berth in (***deliberately avoid***) comparisons between their works and the works of a Lillian Hellman or a William Faulkner (***Lorraine Hansberry- a playwright and writer. She was the first African-American female author to have a play performed on Broadway. Her best known work is the play A Raisin in the Sun – it highlights the lives of Black Americans living under racial segregation in Chicago / James Baldwin- is an American novelist, playwright, essayist, poet, and activist. His essays, as collected in Notes of a Native Son (1955), explore intricacies of racial, sexual, and class distinctions in Western society- Lillian Hellman- is an American playwright, author and screenwriter known for her success on Broadway, as well as her communist sympathies and political activism / William Faulkner- is an American writer and Nobel Prize laureate from Oxford, Mississippi. Faulkner wrote novels, short stories, screenplays, poetry, essays, and a play. He is primarily known for his novels and short stories set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, based on Lafayette County, Mississippi, where he spent most of his life.***)

(b) The Black Writers conference organized at Fisk University in the year 1970 forced writers like Ralph Ellison to stop their creative work altogether (stop writing fiction) and instead focus on prose works or to cease publishing completely. The publication of *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* by Leroi Jones and Larry Neal in 1968 took the ideology of the black separatist criticism farther. The publication of *Black Literature and Theory* by Henry Louis Gates in the year 1984 delineated the challenge confronting the critics of Black literature, namely to devise a critical theory which has its base in black culture. Most of the

black artists such as Chinua Achebe, Mongo Beti, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison and George Lamming have been influenced by their respective black cultures. Consequently, any valid interpretations of their works must be cognizant of the milieu from which they evolved. Leroi Jones campaigned for syncretic use of Euro/ Anglo based critical ideas like Formalism, Marxism, Psychoanalytic and Structuralist and metatextuality in reading black literature. (***Metatextuality is a form of intertextual discourse in which one text makes critical commentary on another text***). With the publication of the book *The Sign and the Signifying Monkey* in 1989, Henry Louis Gates made a turn that aligned him with the separatists in his emphasis on "signification as African based trope. (***The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism is a work of literary criticism and theory by the American scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. first published in 1988. The book traces the folkloric origins of the African-American cultural practice of "signifying" and uses the concept of signifyin(g) to analyze the interplay between texts of prominent African-American writers, specifically Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston and Ishmael Reed. Gates defines two main types of literary Signifyin(g): oppositional (or motivated) and cooperative (or unmotivated). Unmotivated signifyin(g) takes the form of the repetition and alteration of another text. Gates focuses on oppositional or motivated Signifyin(g) and how it "functions as a metaphor for formal revision, or intertextuality, within the Afro-American literary tradition / A literary trope is the use of figurative language, via word, phrase or an image, for artistic effect such as using a figure of speech. The word trope has also come to be used for describing commonly recurring literary and rhetorical devices,^[2] motifs or clichés in creative works.***)

- (c) Among the critics of African- American literary tradition, some of them advocate a unique interpretive tool to be used in interpreting the texts written by black writers, while others like Georges Poulet and Trudier Harris argued that the black academics should find more interpretive tools to study texts by black authors. The advocates of the second category believe that the usage of more interpretive tools would be of European origin. But the texts authored by black authors would have a better chance of being read, interpreted, taught and gain an entry into the canon. The syncretic interpretive tool of Euro-black origin is more appropriate for criticism in black and white literature / Afro-American literature. Such a kind of criticism would produce a unique cultural product (Black/ white namely Afro-American) . The syncretists advocate the sharing of knowledge / culture between the Whites and the Black through the unique cultural product -. Afro-American . (***Georges Poulet-Georges is a Belgian literary critic associated with the Geneva School. Best known for his four-volume work Studies in Human Time, Poulet rejected formalist approaches to literary criticism and advanced the theory that criticism requires the reader to open his or her mind to the consciousness of the author. /Trudier Harris- an American literary historian***)

The Black literary separatists agree with Henry Highland Garnett who wrote in 1843 that it "takes the slave to understand the problems of the slave" and the minute "outsiders" begin to judge the "deeds" (texts) of the slaves, they do so with cultural blinders and malice aforethought. Reginald Martin refers to similar arguments made in 1980s by Amiri Baraka in the pages of Black American Literature Forum ("Afro-American Literature and Class Struggle" [1982]), and by Alice Walker *In Search of Mother Garden*. (***Alice Walker is an American novelist, short story writer, poet, and social activist. In 1982, / Amiri Baraka previously known as LeRoi Jones and Imamu Amear Baraka is an American writer of poetry, drama, fiction, essays and music criticism.***)

Danger in the arguments of the syncretists and the separatist

a. The syncretic approach, set the uniqueness of the black perspective against the perspective of Soviet, European and Anglo-American critical thought. The syncretic approach paved way for the amalgamation of the unique black perspective into that of the European/ Anglo- American perspective. The amalgamation would lead to the loss of the black uniqueness and discernible difference. The contribution of black writer or critic to literature or literary theory would become white or American contribution. Reginald Martin cites the example of Nancy Reagan (1981) who at a White House celebration of the arts stated that Benny Goodman was one of the "founders" of jazz and Dizzy Gillespie rolled his eyes and gasped for breath in the background. Mrs. Reagan asserted and acclaimed jazz as a unique "American" art form, but she forgot to mention and acknowledge that jazz and its founders were also uniquely black. (*Nancy Davis Reagan is an American film actress and the second wife of Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States. She was the first lady of the United States from 1981 to 1989./ Jazz- Jazz is a music genre that originated in the African-American communities of New Orleans, United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with its roots in blues and ragtime. It is major form of musical expression in traditional and popular music, linked by the common bonds of African-American and European-American musical parentage / Benjamin David Goodman is an American jazz clarinetist and bandleader known as the "King of Swing / John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie is an American jazz trumpeter, bandleader, composer, educator and singer.*).

The syncretists do not openly admit the possibility of such amalgamation and transfiguration of the black literary contribution into American literary terrain. Within the syncretic argument, lies the dubious ideal of one singular vast literary canon comprising of great texts based on pure literary merit. The syncretists also advocate for a **matrix canon**- comprising of the black and Anglo-American literary texts instead of " **mini canons** – namely Black literature, Jewish literature, Hispanic literature, Latin American literature, etc. Mini canons would make teaching of literary writing uninteresting and difficult- like literature for the working class, heterosexual white male authors of the 1930s, lesbian authors of the 1970's, homosexual black male Catholic writers of the late 1980's or Jewish mulatto literature etc. The syncretists also believe that a matrix canon would represent the black-authored texts better than the mainstream canon like African American literature or mini canons like Black Literature or Mulato literature. The syncretists opine that the new matrix canon would become the mainstream canon in the near future. (*canon- the writings or other works that are generally agreed to be good, important, and worth studying/ matrix- a group of numbers or other things arranged in a rectangle that can be used to solve a problem or measure something / syncretism- the combining of different religions, cultures, or ideas*)

b. The separatists retort by stating that critical merit is attainable only when the critic is endowed with a power that is rooted in the cultural climate of one's own time (experience, culture or milieu) The separatists question how it is possible for the black syncretists to construct a matrix canon that is inclusive of black authors, if the black critics are educationally and politically estranged from black culture and its unique cultural product, namely that of black-authored texts. The literary merit of black-authored texts is denied. The separatists cite an instance that occurred in the proposal for Stanford's core curriculum in the year 1987. The proposal did not include any black- authored text or criticism. The black colleges fall into fiscal disarray and the job opportunities for the black people is bleak and the teachers lack sufficient training to teach black literature. The black separatists insist or emphasise on the exclusiveness of black critical practice. Reginald Martin is of the opinion that the importance given to exclusiveness of black critical practice only makes them to focus and discuss about themselves.

Reginald Martin is of the opinion that both the schools of thought- black separatist and black syncretist could benefit only by research outside the discipline of literary theory. In the book titled *Black Athena : The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation , Vol I : The Fabrication of Greece - 1785-1985* series published in 1987, Martin Bernal questions the belief that anything offered by Europe in the study of literature is new and uniquely European or White. Martin Bernal is a British scholar who specialised in Chinese history. The main thesis of Bernal's book was that Greek civilization was rooted in Egyptian, Phoenician, and African influences rather than Indo-European ones. Bernal argues that such influences were underestimated due to racism and religious prejudice, especially among nineteenth-century Europeans. Ancient Greece has been the most important single contributor to later Western European culture. The Europeans propagated that ancient Greek culture developed as the result of one or more invasions from the north by Indo-European speakers or "Hellenes." But Martin Bernal reiterated that the ancient Greek civilisation was both in origin and development black. The ancient Europeans co-opted (**To co-opt is also to claim something as your own when it was really created by others**) on large scale the literary arts of the Blacks . The ideas expressed by Martin Bernal was re-emphasised by the black historians like H.C. Jackson in his work titled *Ethiopia and the Origins of Civilisation* (11935), Chancellor Williams, Ivan Van Sertima, Asa Hillard, G. M James in the book titled *Stolen Legacy* (1954), Chiekh Anta Diop in the book titled *The African Origin of Civilisation : Myth or Reality* (1974).The opinions expressed by Martin Bernal was not silenced because he was a British historian and not a black. Thus the corpus of criticism that was assumed to comprise only the European based critical ideas is in reality black based. In the mid sixth and fourth century BC, neither Paramenides nor Aristotle left Greece to study in Norway but only to Egypt and returned with new literary and critical knowledge. The reactionary and internecine argument of black separatists about " unique black indexes" in response to " oppressive white indexes " appears to be moot and self-contradictory.

The unique mode of literary expression and unique critical responses to black – authored texts arose in the United States. The unique African- American themes are equally valid for critical examination like the unique Agrarian critics' ideas. No one objects to study of Agrarian critics' ideas since it advocated the study of literature through a scientific method. The Agrarian (related to land / farming)critics or their ideas are relevant today since they influenced and contributed a great deal to the notion of literary merit. Similarly, the study of African American literary theory and its basis on unique indexes(**a sign or measure of something/ a system that measures the present value of something when compared to its previous value or a fixed standard**) would illuminate the reader in distinct ways.

Essay on Reginald Martin's African-American Literary Criticism : An Introduction

Reginald Martin is a professor and critic of African American literary criticism. Reginald Martin outlines several historical events that occurred in literature and criticism written by black writers/ critics in the 1960's. The dichotomy between the separatists and the syncretist methodology or approach to Black writing is the cornerstone of the essay.

Black separatism is a separatist political movement that seeks separate economic and cultural development for those of African descent in societies, particularly in the United States. It is a subcategory of black nationalism, that stems from the idea of racial solidarity. Black separatism emphasises that the black people should organize themselves based on their common experience of oppression and suppression, as a result of their colour, race, religion and African heritage. The black separatist seek their original cultural homeland. They believe that a society dominated by the Whites would hinder the progress of the Black. Black nationalism is a type of nationalism that emphasises on the distinctiveness of the blacks as a race. They advocate the empowerment of the black community at the socio-economic and political level. They focus on black pride, justice and identity.

Black separatism and Black nationalism advocate the rights of the black people. Black separatist endorse the view that the Blacks should be physically and geographically separated from people of other races, in particular the Whites. They recommend and emphasise on a separate nation for the Blacks. On the contrary, Black nationalist do not advocate or recommend physical separation of the Blacks. All black separatists are black nationalists, but all black nationalists are not black separatists.

The separatists argued for a unique and distinct black way of judging and perceiving literature. This method of establishing the uniqueness and distinctiveness of black literary taste could not be put into operation, if the writing by blacks is compared with that of the Whites. The blacks were oppressed by the whites, and the black writers chose to write against this oppression and therefore a comparative paradigm is questionable for the Black separatists.

The publication of *Black Literature and Theory* by Henry Louis Gates in the year 1984 delineated the challenge confronting the critics of Black literature, namely to devise a critical theory which has its base in black culture. Most of the black artists such as Chinua Achebe, Mongo Beti, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison and George Lamming have been influenced by their respective black culture. Leroi Jones campaigned for a syncretic use of Euro/ Anglo based critical ideas like Formalism, Marxism, Psychoanalytic and Structuralist and metatextuality in reading black literature.

Among the critics of African- American literary tradition, some of them advocate a unique interpretive tool to be used in interpreting the texts written by black writers, while others like Georges Poulet and Trudier Harris argue that the black academics should find more interpretive tools to study texts by black authors. The syncretic interpretive tool of Euro-black origin is more appropriate for criticism in black and white literature / Afro-American literature.

The Black literary separatists agree with Henry Highland Garnett who wrote in 1843 that it "takes the slave to understand the problems of the slave" and the minute "outsiders" begin to judge the "deeds" (texts) of the slaves, they do so with cultural blinders and malice aforethought. Reginald Martin refers to similar arguments made in 1980s by Amiri Baraka in the pages of Black American Literature Forum ("Afro-American Literature and Class Struggle" [1982]), and by Alice Walker *In Search of Mother Garden*.

The syncretic approach, set the uniqueness of the black perspective against the perspective of Soviet, European and Anglo-American critical thought. The syncretic approach paved way for the amalgamation of the unique black perspective into that of the European/ Anglo- American perspective. The amalgamation would lead to the loss of the black uniqueness and discernible difference. The contribution of black writer or critic to literature or literary theory would become white or American contribution. The syncretists also advocate for a **matrix canon**- comprising of the black and Anglo-American literary texts instead of " **mini canons** – namely Black literature, Jewish literature, Hispanic literature, Latin American literature, etc

The separatists retort by stating that critical merit is attainable only when the critic is endowed with a power that is rooted in the cultural climate of one's own time (experience, culture or milieu) The separatists question how it is possible for the black syncretists to construct a matrix canon that is inclusive of black authors, if the black critics are educationally and politically estranged from black culture and its unique cultural product, namely that of black-authored texts. The literary merit of black-authored texts is denied. Reginald Martin is of the opinion that both the schools of thought-black separatist and black syncretists could benefit only by research on black-authored texts from outside the discipline of literary theory. The study of African American literary theory and its basis on unique indexes would illuminate the reader in distinct ways.

Short Questions

1. Define the terms Black separatism and Black nationalism.
2. Why did the Black separatist shout down the integrationist polemics?
3. What is the strain of similarity noted between Ralph Ellison and James Joyce?
4. What was the argument of the Black separatists?
5. Why were the Black separatist against a comparison between the writing of the Blacks with that of the Whites?
6. What did Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin advocate?
7. Which literary work propagated the ideology of black separatist criticism?
8. What did Henry Louis Gate advocate?
9. Define the term metatextuality.
10. Define the concept of signifying.
11. Why did the black separatist agree with Henry Highland Garnett?
12. What is the disadvantage of the syncretic approach in black writing?
13. What examples are cited by Reginald Martin to validate the danger of syncretic approach?
14. Distinguish between matrix and mini canon.
15. What are the disadvantages of mini canon?
16. Why do the separatists object to the matrix canon?

INTRODUCTION TO NEIL LAZARUS



Neil Lazarus is Professor in English and Comparative Studies at University of Warwick. His areas of specialisation includes - 'postcolonial' literatures and cultures; postcolonial theory; imperialism, nationalism and anticolonial resistance; modernisation/ capitalist modernity/ modernism; globalisation. World literature

SUMMARY OF GREAT EXPECTATIONS AND AFTER : THE POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIALISM IN AFRICAN FICTION

Ghana gained independence on March 6, 1952 from Britain. It became the first sub-Saharan African colony to attain independence. Over one lakh people gathered in the Polo ground in Accra to be a part of the ceremony that took place in the midnight. The atmosphere was filled with excitement. The Union Jack flag was lowered and the new Ghanaian flag of red, green and gold was hoisted in

its place. The new President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah addressed the gathering. He took pride in the fact that the nation of Ghana had finally gained independence. He solicits the people of Ghana to work with perseverance and demonstrate to other nations that a black man is capable of managing his own affairs without any sort of intrusion and domination.

The reverberations of the Nkrumah's speech echoed over the next eight or ten years, since state after state attained the political independence from the European colonial power. The State Guinea, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya attained independence in 1952, 1960, 1962 and 1963 respectively. All these states organised ceremonies to celebrate their independence. Every ceremony had celebrants and leaders celebrating triumph. There was music and dancing in the streets, banquets and festivities.

The ceremony of independence was a legitimate occasion for joy. The ceremony of independence heralded the end of colonialism. It asserted the great victory of national movement of liberation. The ceremony of independence transformed the harsh memories of struggle, memories of violence and degradation and hardship of imprisonment and torture into images of heroism. Before attaining independence from the colonial British empire, human death was perceived as loss, but after independence loss was viewed as sacrifice, which did not prove futile either.

The ceremony of independence enabled a retrievable of the past as meaningful, namely that of sacrifice by those who resisted the colonial oppression. The attainment of independence reconceptualised the notion of loss which was construed as defeat during the rule of the colonial British empire. The notion of defeat encountered by the colonized or oppressed under the colonial British empire led to the notion of conflict and conflict in turn led to resistance. The defeat experienced by the colonized during colonialism was viewed as moments of resistance that led to independence. Every colonial subject in Africa had endured the depredation and dispossession during colonialism. Every colonial subject had struggled against colonialism. The victory gained belonged to all the colonized. The colonized are the nation's liberators. In the novel *A Grain of Wheat*, the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo portrays the night of independence. The Kenyan ceremony is similar to that of the Ghanaian ceremony.

Thiongo states that Kenya regained her Uhuru from the British on 12th December 1963. A minute before the midnight, lights were put out at the Nairobi stadium in Kenya so that people from all over the country and the world could be engulfed by darkness. In the dark, the Union Jack was lowered. The new Kenyan flag flew and fluttered when the lights came on. The police band played the new national anthem and the crowd cheered with exuberance at the sight of a flag that was black, red and green. The cheering sound of the celebrants in Kenya sounded like cracking of many trees that fell on the thick mud in the stadium.

Ngugi also speaks of another mood that is to be noted among the crowds in the streets, a mood that has not been identified, namely the mood of expectation “*Everybody waited for something to happen. This ‘waiting’ and the uncertainty that went with it was a taut cord beneath the screams and shouts and laughter.*” Independence did not only signal the end of colonialism but also the emergence of what Nkrumah called the ‘African personality’ onto the world's stage. The passing world- historical era of colonialism gave birth to a new world- historical era. In the new world- historical era, the slumbering giant of Africa awakened and left an indelible print upon the world.

Neil Lazarus explains the two-fold reasons for having drawn attention to the ceremony of independence. The first reason is that the ceremony of independence represented a striking event. The ceremony of independence was an ‘event apart’ for the politicians, celebrants, writers and intellectuals. The ceremony of independence stood outside of time like Walter Benjamin's “time of the now.” The ceremony of independence resisted history by staring it down. Walter Benjamin notes that a historical materialist cannot do away with the notion of the present. The notion of present is not a transition, but one where in time stands still and has come to a stop. Similarly, for Africans, the moment of independence represented ‘a present.’ The second reason for beginning with the moment of independence is that an understanding of the significance of nationhood by

African intellectuals during the years of decolonisation, enabled them to understand the trajectory of African Literature. A sense of the various literary discourses of postcolonialism could only be evolved when these discourses are read and related to the expectation of independence. In the novel titled *The Beautiful Ones are Not yet Born*, Ayi Kweo Armah notes that the dawn of independence was beautiful. The young hoped for the return of the good.

Great expectations attended the process of decolonisation and colonisation in places like Ghana and Senegal. The expectations that arose with decolonisation were not fulfilled. In the year 1957, Nkrumah looked forward to an era of unity, strength and humanity, but found fragmentation, weakness and social violence. Independence did not bring either peace or prosperity to Africa. On the other hand, independence had been a witness to social and economic stagnation or “obsession with politics” in the words of J.F Ade Ajayi. In the article titled “Expectations of Independence”, Ajayi states that the most fundamental aspect of post-independent Africa has been development, namely the quality of life, of the average farmer or his family in the village or worker in the urban areas. The plight of the farmer or the urban worker has not improved. The plight of the farmer and the worker has worsened with independence. With independence, many African countries found it difficult to provide sufficient food and energy resource for their population. The states that gained independence are yet to evolve a stable political structure that is imbued with a sense of national commitment and social justice around which the loyalties of the masses could be mobilised.

There is uneven development between different regions of the same country and between cities and rural areas of the same region. Inequities of income that prevailed during the colonial rule widened considerably since independence. Inequity of income has led to civil unrest and civil war. People experience a sense of insecurity related to life and property. The dreams of the intellectuals and politicians have failed to materialise since independence.

Neil Lazarus states that a look at the postcolonial era in Africa made the writers to realise that something was amiss. Decolonisation was experienced by them as a mode of massive transformation and opening up of options. But, the writers, intellectuals and politicians realised that their revolution and resistance had derailed. Most of the intellectuals worked as professionals in the cities. They realised that the notion of liberation, which was the essence of independence was limited in reality. It was a liberation that was meant primarily for bankers, lawyers and not for the common man or for that matter, population by and large. The writers became painfully conscious of the plight of the majority of their fellowmen who were illiterate. The intellectuals were comfortable or even rich in the midst of squalor and abject poverty.

Some of the African writers responded to the harsh reality of independent African society with disillusionment and ‘post-political’ cynicism. Many intellectuals experienced that they were becoming more and more socially marginalised with the advent of postcolonialism. The intellectuals felt isolated and ineffectual stranded between the masses of the population and the political elite. In the novel titled *This Earth, My Brother*, Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor observes that the African revolution failed since no revolution is ever successful. Politics makes more promises that it can ever deliver. The number of victims precede than the fortunate ones. The sensitive intellectual occupies a middle position like the character Amamu in the novel by Kofi Awoonor. He believed that humankind was not made for happiness on earth. Some of the African intellectuals felt crippled because of the lack of social utility.

In the novel *A Man of the People*, Chinua Achebe presents a bleak vision of Nigeria as leaderless and as unleadable. The novel is a satirical indictment of the grotesque self-interest of the Nigerian political elite. The novel echoes the confusion and frustration of Chinua Achebe. The postcolonial Nigeria is characterised by growing lawlessness of the civil society and it escapes the comprehension sensibility of Chinua Achebe. The novel ends with a dubious call to moral decency. Integrity cannot gain entry into politics that is imbued with the pain of death. The character Max, an activist campaigning for political office is murdered by his opponents. His lover shoots the man responsible for his death. Chinua Achebe reflects on the incident and states people have resorted

to their own legal course, due to delay in justice. Other African writers in the 1960s, offered more militant conclusions to their novels than either Achebe or Awoonor. These writers thought radically about their situation and felt betrayed and deceived by the promise of independence. The African political elite had proclaimed that with the passing of colonialism, everything had changed for the better. But radical African writers of the 1960's drew a different conclusion. The radical African writers were of the opinion that independence had altered only very little and represented only " a change of embezzlers"(words of Ayi Kwei Armah). Armah observed that the effect of independence was a mere substitute of a black top for a white one on the colonial bottle. The bottle remained intact during the moment of transition.

The radical African writers of the 1960's refused politics on the ground that it never did any good for the people. The literature of the 1960's focused on the parasitism of the African political elite in attempting to account for the stagnation of postcolonial society. In every work, the African elite is exposed for his ruthlessness, vulgarity, conspicuous consumption, corruption, greed, crass materialism and lack of vision. In the novel *Fragments*, Ayi Kwei Armah describes an afternoon gathering of some of Ghana's people of substance. In the work of Armah, the pull to disillusion and despair is resisted and overcome. Through graphic language and imagery, Armah depicts a demeaning, degraded world that moves towards despair. Armah portrays characters like the "Teacher" and the central protagonist " the man" embracing and withstanding disillusion in the novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The teacher lived through the days of hope. The day, he realised that Africa had only to hold on to its dreams and witnessed the collapse of these visions he resigns to despair. To quote Armah "It is not a choice between life and death," he tells us, "but what kind of death we can bear, in the end. Have you not seen there is no salvation ." The words of the teacher reminds one of Peter Abraham's preface to a *A Wreath For Udomo*, where a couple of lines from the poem *To a foiled Revolver or Revoltress* by Walt Whitman, the American poet introduces a novel in which the revolution is betrayed by the very man who had led it to victory :

" Did we think victory great? So it is-
But now it seems to me, when it cannot be helped
that defeat is great,
And that death and dismay are great."

Chinua Achebe comments that the passive hero of Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* , ultimately sunk into despair and disillusion. Neil Lazarus reads the novel in a different perspective. The novel is not about passivity and disillusion. On the contrary, the novel is about the existential strategies deployed by the protagonist to survive the bleak disillusioned condition. The first three novels of Armah, namely *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1979) made a scathing critique of the irresponsibility of the postcolonial leadership in Africa. The novels condemned the philistinism and the ideological bankruptcy of the postcolonial elite. The elite was portrayed as murderously hypocritical, who not only lived beyond their own means but also beyond the means of their societies. The elites are portrayed as kleptocratic, whose incessant wealth and power implies the poverty and powerlessness of the peasants and the proletarians.

Armah also looked beyond the elite, at the others (poor Black) who have wider social implications of existence in any society. In this sense, the work of Armah was reminiscent of other radical writers like Thiongo, who preferred to reaffirm their social commitment even in the darkest moments of postcolonial night. The radical writers were of the opinion that African revolution was sabotaged by its very leaders and it did not fail neither in intent nor in spirit. The revolution was betrayed since its leaders realized that with independence, wealth, power and privilege meant more to them than social justice. In the reality, wealth, power and privilege precludes to social injustice.

Neo-colonialism brought about a change in African literature. Independence was a hoax, since it signified a refinement of the colonial system, not its abolition. Armah described independence as an “ equilibrating political agreement”, Achebe called independence as a “ great collusive swindle” and Ama Ata Aidoo referred to independence as “ a dance of the masquerades called independence “and Ngugi spoke of” flag independence which refers to a situation where the indigenous government is ruling and oppressing people on behalf of the American, European and Japanese capital.

Writings of the first decade of independence

The African writings of the first decade of independence were obsessed with independence as failure, with what independence did not bring. The intellectuals belonging to the first decade of independence, were concerned with such issues though they were marginalised. In the writings of the 1960s ,African scholars and intellectuals supported the view that the setbacks and defeats of the postcolonial era were unavoidable, since they derived largely from inherited problems. In the book titled *Black Star: A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah* (1973), the historian Basil Davidson commented on the passage of independence in Africa. With independence, the new African government did not take over a prosperous colonial business but a profound colonial crisis. Poverty and hunger prevailed widely in rural areas. The towns and the cities grew hugely in size as rural people flocked to them in search of food and jobs and could not find either.

During the colonial rule or before independence, there was a widening gap between the few with money, house and good jobs and the many without any of these. Assuming power, the new African leaders had to confront the structural and unavoidable problems. The historian Basil Davidson uses the metaphor of old cracked ill fit dish that was handed down by the colonial empire to the new African leaders after post -independence. The dish was not edible for it carried with it the junk and the jumble of a century of colonial muddle. Neil Lazarus endorses the comment of Davidson by stating that the expectations that characterised the ceremony of independence celebration, namely decolonisation was knocked down not because of conditional reason, but because of the failure in realising this at the time of the independence celebration. The promises made on the celebratory night of African independence were unrealistic from the very beginning. The African intellectuals of the 1960's had overestimated the emancipatory potential of independence. Later the African writers of the 1968 were ridden with despair. The predicament of the African writers of the 1968 echoes the forewarning issued by Max Horkheimer who stated that the intellectuals who are uncritical during celebration of social victories would be disappointed by defeats later.

The end of the decade saw a shift in the sensibility of African writing – a move towards the writing of the African communities. The attention was deflected from the urban elites onto different categories- namely peasantry, proletariat, the unemployed, the hungry, the uprooted and the dispossessed. The notion of neo-colonialism was criticized on the grounds that it was imprecise and unhistorical. In the article titled “Neo-colonialism, state -capitalism or Revolution”, Archie Mafeje, critiqued neo-colonialism on the ground that the term neo-colonialism is ambiguous. Though the import of the world neo-colonialism is change and continuity. The qualitative difference between neo-colonialism and continuity is lost at a later stage. Neo-colonialism is revision of forms and methods of control in order to maintain the old dependency relations. Thus historically and qualitatively, a distinction must be made between colonialism, which was an unmitigated imposition and neo-colonialism which is a contractual relationship accompanied by severe constraints.

In the year 1967, Thiongo charged the African writers for having neglected their responsibilities towards the populations at large. The black intellectuals, the black bourgeoisie got the power but did not evolve any policy that would benefit the peasants and the workers. In order to combat their social ineffectualness, the writers had to change the very purpose of writing. A literature written by

the elite, about the elite and for the consumption of the elite could not bear the burden of social activism. The writers should use new forms or styles of writing that would save them from the steak of mere intellectualism. The writings of Ousmane Sembene of Senegal, a Senegalese writer proved to be significant in bringing about a change in the sensibility of the writers.

In his early writing, Sembene broke with the urban intellectual biases that prevailed in the African literature. In the novel titled *God's Bits of Wood* published in 1960, Sembene narrated the story of a railroad strike in the French West Africa during the 1940's. He explored the ways in which colonialism and the strike affected the everyday lives of ordinary people. He concentrated on a number of workers and their families and those with whom they came into contact. In the subsequent works, Sembene gave prominence to the dispossessed strata of modern African society. The books of Sembene are populated by the aged, by the landless peasants and slum dwellers without work, for whom nothing is assured not even their own survival. He drew attention to the daily struggles of this 'invisible multitude', invisible to the architects of African modernisation. Sembene shows that these invisible multitude are the casualties of the existing order but subtly hints at their potential impact on society. The writing that emerged in Africa since 1970, took the work of Sembene as inspiration and point of departure. Two types of literature emerged and they need a special mention. One is the literature composed by women and the second is 'street-wise' literature. Both of these writings, root themselves in the experience of hardship and dispossession. The new feminist writing addresses itself to the lives of men and women in poor peasant communities and is concerned with the material existence of day to day life. The work of Bessie Head, South African writer is concerned with tension between gender and culture system. African women were excluded from the political arena before independence but also even after independence there was no improvement in their plight. Bessie Head remarks that African independence seemed to be one more affliction on top of other afflictions. The other feminist writers concerned themselves with the status of middle-class women who are simultaneously privileged by virtue of their class position and subordinated by virtue of their gender. In the Senegalese feminist writer Mariama Ba's novel *So Long a Letter*, discrepancy exists between the protagonists' relative social mobility as a middle-class subject and as a female subject. As a middle-class female subject, Ramatoulalye is able to write that independence did not bring any change in the empowerment of women. The female is made aware of "slender liberty" granted to women. Every Senegalese woman fear being an object in the service of man.

The new street wise literature tends to be urban rather than rural in its focus. It narrates the lives of beggars and petty criminals in the sprawling, ugly ghettos that have mushroomed around the edges of large cities throughout Africa. The temper of the writing is pragmatic and un-romantic Lazarus quotes a passage from the Kenyan novelist, Meja Mwangi's novel *Going Down River Road* about the abject living condition of the people – criminals and poverty stricken etc. The writing of this kind is a critique of the social economy of the African nation.

New writing of the 1960s

A tremendous change is noticeable in the writings of 1960's and 1970's. There is a re-evaluation of formal priorities and artistic goals. The fourth novel of Armah *Two thousand Seasons* published in 1973 deals with the peasants of the ordinary life. The novel is a re-mythologisation of African history. The bitter reflection of the betrayal of socialism in Africa after independence is set aside. Of all the writers, it is Thiongo who evinces great sensitivity to and awareness of the plight of the peasantry and laboring classes in his work. Thiongo has never written of the urban elites. In his earlier work, he tended to focus on the local, rural responses to colonialism in Kenya. In the third novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, published in 1967, he painted an unforgettable picture of the depredations and hardships endured by the rural population during the years of Kenyan emergency between 1952 and 1956,

when thousand of Kenyan women took to the forests to join the land and freedom armies fighting against the colonial government.

The novel *Petals of Blood* by Thiongo is a fine example of the new radical writing in Africa. The novel is set in the countryside. It shows a community struggling against an environment that a combination of factors have contrived to render sterile and harsh, namely drought, desertification, colonial neglect and despoilation, postcolonial mismanagement and indifference. The positive impact of freedom was not known to these villagers. The novel insisted upon the transformability of existing conditions. Chinua Achebe attenuated that the responsibility of the African writer was towards re-education and regeneration. There is a difference between Achebe's position in 1965 and Ngugi. Achebe sees the intellectual as an educator, Ngugi sees the intellectual as an activist. Achebe speaks of the intellectual as a leader whose responsibility is to guide the masses, Ngugi calls upon intellectuals not only to be on the side of the masses in their revolutionary struggle but to position themselves directly among them. The debate between these two positions has commenced in the new African writing. The future of African literature rests on the outcome of this stance.

Essay on Great Expectations And After : The Politics Of Postcolonialism in African Fiction

Neil Lazarus is Professor in English and Comparative Studies at University of Warwick. The essay *Great Expectations and After : The politics of Postcolonialism in African Fiction* begins with the celebration of Ghanaian independence on March 6, 1952 from Britain. The new President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, takes pride in the fact that the nation of Ghana had finally gained independence. He solicits the people of Ghana to work with perseverance and demonstrate to other nations that a black man is capable of managing his own affairs without any sort of intrusion and domination. The reverberations of the Nkrumah's speech echoed over the next eight or ten years, since state after state attained the political independence from the European colonial power. The State Guinea, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya attained independence in 1952, 1960, 1962 and 1963 respectively. All these states organised ceremonies to celebrate their independence.

The attainment of independence reconceptualised the notion of loss which was construed as defeat during the rule of the colonial British empire. The notion of defeat encountered by the colonized or oppressed under the colonial British empire led to the notion of conflict and conflict in turn led to resistance. The defeat experienced by the colonized during colonialism was viewed as moments of resistance that led to independence. Ngugi also speaks of another mood that is to be noted among the celebrants, a mood that has not been identified, namely the mood of expectation.

Neil Lazarus explains the two-fold reasons for having drawn attention to the ceremony of independence. The first reason is that the ceremony of independence represented a striking event. An understanding of the significance of nationhood by African intellectuals during the years of decolonisation, enabled them to understand the trajectory of African Literature. The expectations that arose with decolonisation were not fulfilled. In the article titled "Expectations of Independence", Ajayi states that the most fundamental aspect of post-independent Africa has been development, namely the quality of life, of the average farmer or his family in the village or worker in the urban areas. The plight of the farmer or the urban worker has not improved.

Some of the African writers responded to the harsh reality of independent African society with disillusionment and 'post-political' cynicism. In the novel titled *This Earth, My Brother*, Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor observes that the African revolution failed since no revolution is ever successful. Politics makes more promises that it can ever deliver. The sensitive intellectual occupies a middle position like the character Amamu in the novel by Kofi Awoonor. He believed that humankind was not made for happiness on earth. Some of the African intellectuals felt crippled because of the lack of social utility. In the novel *A Man of the People*, Chinua Achebe presents a bleak vision of Nigeria

as leaderless and as unleadable. The novel is a satirical indictment of the grotesque self-interest of the Nigerian political elite.

The literature of the 1960's focused on the parasitism of the African political elite in attempting to account for the stagnation of postcolonial society. In every work, the African elite is exposed for his ruthlessness, vulgarity, conspicuous consumption, corruption, greed, crass materialism and lack of vision. In the novel *Fragments*, Ayi Kwei Armah describes an afternoon gathering of some of Ghana's people of substance. In the work of Armah, the pull to disillusion and despair is resisted and overcome. Through graphic language and imagery, Armah depicts a demeaning, degraded world that moves towards despair. Armah portrays characters like the "Teacher" and the central protagonist "the man" embracing and withstanding disillusion in the novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Chinua Achebe comments that the passive hero of Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, ultimately sunk into despair and disillusion. Neil Lazarus reads the novel in a different perspective. The novel is not about passivity and disillusion. On the contrary, the novel is about the existential strategies deployed by the protagonist to survive the bleak disillusioned condition.

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Short Questions

1. What was the significance of Kwame Nkrumah's address?
2. What did the ceremony of independence signify?
3. How was the notion of loss reconceptualized after independence?
4. What is the mood observed by Thiongo in the ceremony of independence?
5. What are the two reasons attributed by Neil Lazarus for having drawn attention to the ceremony of independence?
6. Why did the Black intellectuals feel the failure of independence?
7. How did the African writers respond to the reality of African society?
8. Why did Kofi Awoonor proclaim that no revolution is successful?
9. How does Chinua Achebe present Nigeria in *A Man of the people*?
10. What is Chinua Achebe's comment on Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones are Not yet Born*?
11. How does Neil Lazarus differently read Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones are Not yet Born*?
12. What did the first three novels of Armah critique?
12. What is the historian Basil Davidson's comment on the passage of independence in Africa?
13. What is Max Horkheimer's forewarning about the uncritical intellectuals?
14. What was the shift in the sensibility of African literature after 1970?
15. Why did Archie Mafeje critique neo-colonialism?
16. What is the central concern of streetwise literature in African writing?
17. What is the difference between Achebe and Ngugi's position in African writing?
18. Why is the novel *Petals of Blood* regarded as the finest example of new writing in Africa?

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