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*A Journey Through Global Literature*

At the start of this course, I introduced myself as someone who struggles with reading. I recall going as far as stating that I dread reading books! Upon learning that this course is known to be difficult, I had high expectations in taking this course since the start of the semester. I had intentionally put myself in an authentic, new environment hoping that I could challenge myself by being consistent in my practice of reading and writing. I am thoroughly glad to have been able to participate in this class and am very thankful that we were able to select our books from a wide range of selections from the Major 20<sup>th</sup> Century Writers library; I am proud to mention that this course has increased my reading habit tremendously and I have finished six of the last seven books (that's approximately 86% - a bewildering rate compared to my previous top record of 30%). Books like *Between the World and Me*, *The Fire Next Time*, *The Fire This Time*, *Memoir of a Woman Doctor*, *The Patience Stone*, *Saturday*, and *The Great Gatsby* have exposed me to powerful perspectives from a breadth of cultures – all which present themes that are prevalent to this very day. This is my journey through global literature.

I remember feeling enchanted while reading through Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*. Reading an epistolary novel for the first time, I was quickly drawn into his personalized form of writing. In these letters to his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates recounts the realities of being black in both old and modern America – the inevitable suffering and privilege. Coates has grown through multiple, viciously shifting cultures in America but his tales are relevant to all generations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His compelling entries explore the idea that the chasm between white and black people should not so easily and merely be accredited to racism, but also to a disparate world of thought that is prevalent in those who believe themselves to be white. Coates

writes with an influence from John C. Calhoun's analysis of the division of the people – "the two great divisions of society are not the rich and poor, but white and black. And all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals". In his entries, Coates further analyzes Calhoun's argument and explores the theme of racism as a machine that is continuously reinvented throughout generations. This machine is fashioned for every circumstance to benefit white people. Coates then re-establishes the crimes and prominence of white supremacy as an indelible force; an injustice that, perhaps, is not rooted in the color of white or black, but rather a modern invention of the new white people.

Ta-Nehisi Coates describes that the destiny for a black person is to reside "down in the valley", for "a mountain is not a mountain if there is nothing below" (Coates 105). He uses this expression to elaborate to his son, that for white people to exist, for their Dream to remain intact, and for their survival of godliness, his identity as a black person must, inherently, reside in the identity of a white person. He solidifies this through his warning that "there is no them without you, and without the right to break you they must necessarily fall from the mountain, lose their divinity, and tumble out of the Dream" (104). Coates suggests that the sanctity of white people and their Dreams rely on the existence of black people. This right to plunder black people is an ancient practice, derived from trading black bodies. These black bodies are used as currency, as fuel, as a purchased resource to build the mountain – and for the white people to be on this mountain, black people must be below in the valley.

Coates expresses this relationship between white people and black people as the American machine. He argues that this machine has a ravenous, unforgiving engine, and it does not care for the cost of fuel. It only cares that those who are aboard continue to move toward the Dream. In this pursuit, racism and enslavement was not destined to end. In this pursuit, the American machine is not unique. This machine is the essential banality to pursue the Dream. This machine is ancient, it is timeworn, yet it is always new. It is a repetitive cycle

that is continuously reinvented to ensure a ticket for those aboard and a fate for those used as fuel. This lugubrious concept of the machine cries with despair but is unwaveringly beautiful, powerful, and poetic. It confronts the perpetrators who, historically, repeated this practice of using the machine until the fuel no longer served its purpose. Coates argues that “history of civilization is littered with dead ‘races’ (Frankish, Italian, German, Irish) later abandoned because they no longer serve their purpose” (115).

The crime of the American Machine, like all other machines, is that it will always search for new fuel. In this way, the intent of the engineers who built this machine are old, yet it is always new. It will renovate itself to be stronger, faster, and cheaper; burning through more fuel all in the pursuit of a new Dream. Coates turns to argue that racism was engineered by man to be used in this calculated practice. The death of one man is merely the beginning of another – these black bodies were disposable. As generations pass, a new white sheet will be bestowed among those fortunate; they will become the new white people. A new drape will be cast among those unfortunate; they will become black people. And through this practice, the American machine will forever remain a perennial reinvention. This machine will continue to run with the proviso that black people shall always be the fuel.

Coates symbolizes this machine as racism and enslavement. But who is exempt from it? He briefly shared an anecdote in which the Dutch ambassador tried to humiliate Queen Nzinga during negotiations. When the Dutch ambassador tried to humiliate her by refusing her a seat, Queen Nzinga displayed her power by ordering her advisor to all fours to make a human chair for her to sit. Although Coates shared this anecdote to express his then-sense of sought power as a student studying culture, I saw the machine; I saw the white people and black people. In the attempt of humiliation, the Dutch ambassador was white and Queen Nzinga was black. But with her response, Queen Nzinga quickly became white as her advisor, now in the story,

became black. No one else mattered in either of these scenarios, only those who were aboard the machine and those who fuelled the machine.

Interestingly, in both scenarios, the Dutch ambassador and Queen Nzinga were both in pursuit towards their Dreams. Whether they are the white person or the black person is relative to the perspective that it is seen through. Regardless of the perspective, for any Dream to exist, so must the machine. For this machine to exist, so must fuel. For the fuel to exist, so must race. And for race to exist, so must racism. Coates reminds us, that “race is the child of racism, not the father” (7). He advises that race could not have come before racism; it is not a natural practice. Rather, racism came before race so that it could be used as a reason to categorize people. This racism was deliberately and delicately crafted to covertly, yet aggressively, propel the white people towards their Dream. Essentially, race was fabricated for the white people to categorize bodies as black and identify them as fuel.

*Between the World and Me* provokes readers to critically think and analyze this machine. Ta-Nehisi Coates makes us wonder if anyone is really exempt from this categorization and cyclical process of pursuing the Dream. Maybe we are all part of the American machine in one way or another. Perhaps in the end, like many of Coates' history professors had questioned, there is no real white or black, only the upper class. Like the anecdote of the Dutch ambassador and Queen Nzinga, it does not matter the color of one's skin, but rather their rank in the hierarchy of disposable bodies. Perhaps in the end, I, too, am but a body, Dreaming at the expense of another body.

In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin investigates deeper into this theme of racism as a machine. Similar to Coates, Baldwin suggests that the categorization of white and black people was merely a practical creation to conveniently fit the white man's status quo; it assigns power to the white man while enslaving the black man. And like the machine, the white man's privilege exists merely because of the black man's body. Baldwin sheds light to the theory that the

machine and racism is prevalent in all circumstances across every culture. The “race” can be interpreted as anything that categorizes people for the benefit of a higher ranked niche.

Using this interpretation, Baldwin mocks how the Christian church “sanctified and rejoiced in the conquests of the flag” (Baldwin 45) – implying that all of their efforts in capturing, plundering, claiming and then ruling America was done while enslaving the black man, using them to build up the land – “and encouraged, if it did not formulate, the belief that conquest, with the resulting relative well-being of the Western populations, was proof of the favor of God” (46).

Baldwin attempts to expose the hypocritical conflict between religious morals and the realism of the church. Religions that were able to thrive off of the suffering of particular people seems rather unholy, irreconcilable, and incompatible with their written laws. More-so because the Christian church is supposedly regarded as holy and the community as morally righteous. Baldwin was once a devout member and pastor of the church, but he savagely confronts their hypocrisy and compares it to the sanctification and rejoice in the conquest of the black body.

Frequently styled throughout this book, Baldwin’s writing is intricately crafted in prose and lengthy in meter. Sometimes I questioned whether he was writing from an unconscious perspective as if brooding. Nonetheless, the relative long length in meter grants enough space for Baldwin to be assertively objective and succinct while encompassing several themes together. His style demonstrates that he has calculated opinions about the subject and it helps form lively visual imagery to combat this relatively dreary subject. It would often feel like he was inviting readers to imagine and explore the situation themselves. A particular passage that directed me towards my imagination is found on page 45-46 – “God had come a long way from the desert – but then so had Allah, though in a very different direction. God, going north, and rising on the wings of power, had become white. And Allah, out of power, on the dark side of Heaven, had become – for all practical purposes, anyway – black”.

Baldwin's attempt to poke at God's apparent effort in blessing the white man to keep them in power directly connects with Coates' warnings of the ravenous machine. Furthermore, Baldwin's anecdote with the God and Allah can be compared with Coates' anecdote with the Dutch ambassador and Queen Nzinga. Baldwin reinforces the idea that the chasm between white and black people is not specifically about the segregation due to the color of skin, but rather the rise to power at the expense of others. Baldwin mocks cultures that claim to be worthy of a promised sanctity and some right to reign over others – both Christianity and Islam claim similar rights – and Baldwin exposes the ridiculousness of this promise that guides countless naive followers to continue the cycle.

To relay this message, Baldwin plays around with the highest ranked characters any story can have – he toys around with gods. Both God and Allah are gods and readers would expect that any one god would be as equally powerful as the other. But Baldwin is resolute with reality and tells of a story where the fortunate God was able to go north and rise in power while the unfortunate Allah had no power to take, thus ended up on “the dark side of Heaven”, and presumably suffering. This strengthens the idea that for a person to rise in power, another must surrender power. Baldwin challenges the disillusionment of the white belief, especially in the Christian church, that there can only be one heaven and there can only be one god – and it must be their god – otherwise all of their crimes and justifications would not be sanctified in their pursuit of power. The reality that the white man might actually be equal to others in nature would damn them all to the very foundation of this nation in both the state and church.

The humor here is that Baldwin rattles the white belief when writing that Allah is still on heaven. This figure of speech is important to note in his anecdote because it empowers the black people – the oppressed, the suffering, the lower ranked. By challenging the white belief, Baldwin is inherently arguing that black people and their Allah are just as sacred as white people and their God. He implies that white and black people are not so different. Perhaps this

categorization of white or black and rich or poor was all an invention to assign power to a favored man, making him white, and stripping power from the unfavored man, making him black.

Baldwin concludes this passage by consequently and necessarily judging that the morals of Christianity – such as the creation of the favored man and a creation to categorize bodies, to segregate and enslave – are at best ambivalent. He encourages readers to question the honesty and purpose of such morals. With Christianity, it is rather ridiculous that the white man enforces Christian morals onto all other people in the nation and uses it as a standard to judge others when Christianity was an invention to sanctify the crimes of the man in power in the first place. Contrary to belief, it is revealed that there is no sacred honor to begin with. Both Baldwin and Coates explored similar themes of racism as a machine and reinforced one another's beliefs of the literal and metaphorical assignment of white and black people. They both argue that the categorization of white and black people was merely a practical creation to conveniently align with the white man's status quo.

Has anything changed since Baldwin's observations? Jesmyn Ward compiled a trilogy packed with collections from new contemporary writers to answer reflect on this question. Her book, *The Fire This Time*, is more contemporary than Coates' *Between the World and Me* and Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. The writers in this collection have had the luxury of living in a unique time of relative peace where their lives are not so easily and wildly taken as before. It can be observed that Baldwin wrote with fear and haste, Coates wrote with acceptance and time, and these contemporary writers wrote with research and reflection. In the historical time when Baldwin wrote his novel, black bodies were still easily taken and disposable. Whereas Coates lived through generations of observing black equality struggle to rise and injustice common as ever. The contemporary writers in *The Fire This Time* write during a time of relative

peace where black equality, amongst other equality movements, are so common that it is almost rampant.

In such a time like this, the various contemporary writers have been allotted the time to research and reflect on the historical progression of themes like racism as a machine or the cyclical process of oppression and power. Readers can observe this that type of writing style lacks an emphasis in haste or desperation. For example, Isabel Wilkerson is not specifically writing to one person in *Where Do We Go From Here?*, instead she is writing to people as a whole. With no imminent threat to her body, Wilkerson has had the luxury of time to observe the crimes of our nation. She ponders, “we seem to be in a continuing feedback loop of repeating a past that our country has yet to address” as she compares events throughout American history. These events have continued since Baldwin’s time, throughout Coates’ time, and now, in a different form of the machine, in Wilkerson’s time. Yet she does not seem to feel immediately threatened like Baldwin constantly did or Coates had felt.

Similar to Wilkerson’s passage, Jesmyn Ward focuses on the reality that our nation continuously refuses to acknowledge – that racism is still prevalent in America, that oppression continues in a calculated cycle, and the American system repeatedly, systematically reinforces ways to marginalize black people. She compiled *The Fire This Time* as a response to James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* and uses the collection of works to demonstrate the pervasiveness and wit of the cycle. From her own experience, Ward remembers a horrifying situation when Senator Trent Lott said “enthusiastically: *Let’s show ‘em how us good old boys do it.* And then he swung that whip through the air and cracked it above our heads, again and again.” (Ward 5). Students were cheering during the senator’s attempt to reap clout, but Ward couldn’t help but feel frightened and chilled to her bones. She came to a terrifying epiphany; “replace ropes with bullets. Hound dogs with German shepherds. A gray uniform with a bulletproof vest. Nothing is new.” (5); she realized that cyclical machine wasn’t obsolete, it had



simply taken a new form of oppression, and Senator Trent Lott had demonstrated it while students cheered.

In *The Fire This Time*, Part I: Legacy reflects on familiar issues from racism during the time when Baldwin was writing. These issues are digested and interpreted by contemporary writers to then be written as a legacy for future readers. Although they are written in a prose format and essentially stripped of hard metaphors like Baldwin and Coates' writing, the style allows for a very transparent conversation. It takes away the heightened sense of urgency but provides an environment for reflection, rather than preparation. Using this to her advantage in *The Weight*, Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah does not hesitate to resurrect Baldwin's momentum from the grave – “what Baldwin understood is that to be black in America is to have the demand for dignity be at absolute odds with the national anthem” (Ghansah 27).

Ghansah initially divested Baldwin's writing when starting *The Weight*, but she wrote that remark early on as a way to pave a path for her and readers to reflect on. The national anthem she references is the American national anthem. One that is supposed to unite a nation and all its members together under the same mission and goal – more-over to provide a sense of establishment, a sense of community, a sense of Dream, a sense of security and a sense of freedom. Ghansah observes how Baldwin understood that this promise and protection from the national anthem did not extend its invitation to all people in the nation; that this right was reserved for white people; and this would always cause a black man to be corners and at odds when fighting for his own dignity. The promises of the national anthem were reserved for the privileged. And like the cycle, those who created the national anthem deemed themselves as privileged and sought out to marginalize all others. Ghansah observes how this oppressive cycle is tied to the roots of our nation and all those who proclaim the national anthem essentially encourage this type of white power symbolism. This is an example of a systematically embedded exception, crafted for the white people in this country so they may Dream and

remain in power, while the marginalized are doomed to work tirelessly, hypnotized by the Dream from the anthem, all the while being denied the right to claim any part of that Dream let alone the simplest human right – freedom. Ghansah's point is that this momentum can be found just from a song. Ghansah successfully sets the tone for the rest of Part I: Legacy by establishing the thought that if a song can provoke black Americans to be at odds in choosing between their dignity or country, imagine what else could be, or has been, systematically created to marginalize people and oppress the members of America.

Isabel Wilkerson reinforces this narrative. In *Where Do We Go From Here?*, she writes “we may have believed that, if nothing else, the civil rights movement had defined a bar beneath which we could not fall. But history tells us otherwise. We seem to be in a continuing feedback loop of repeating a past that our country has yet to address. Our history is one of the spectacular [black] achievement followed by a violent backlash that threatens to erase the gains and then a long, slow climb to the next mountain, where the cycle begins again” (Wilkerson 59). She explains how even after leaps and bounds are made to move past history, any progress that is made always faces resistance. Wilkerson explores the vicious cycle that continues to oppress the black people and recognizes that after one mountain is built the marginalized must move right on to the next. They are denied the opportunity to stay on the mountain that they had built. This provides support to Jesmyn Ward's focus in this book – that our nation continually refuses to acknowledge that America is as racist and oppressive as ever; that the interest is in those in are already in power, not those who try to rise to it. Ward, Ghansah, and Wilkerson all explore and suggest how the white people have learned to be creative and more manipulative with methods used to oppress their own countrymen. Although writing in a new century, this idea stretches back to when Baldwin wrote, and more recently when Coates had written about the machine. As the machine continues to haunt the marginalized, Part II: Reckoning calls those to account for their actions.

In *White Rage*, by Carol Anderson, Anderson suggests how the cycle of white oppression continues to refine itself as a systematic method of pursuing racism and marginalizing people. The fear is real and this oppression has become so organized and embedded into our daily, societal culture that it is one we cannot avoid. Yet it is nearly impossible to challenge because we also depend on it. It is another method of requiring black people to bend their knee for crucial services. Again, to choose their dignity or their country. “Because white rage doesn’t have to take to the streets and face rubber bullets to be heard. Instead, white rage carries an aura of respectability and has access to the courts, police, legislatures, and governors, who cast its efforts as noble, though they are actually driven by the most ignoble motivations” (Anderson 83).

The incredibly sly manipulation that is exposed here is that those in power and rank, who are typically thought to be respected, also became part of the cycle. Similar to Ta-Nehisi Coates, Anderson’s message can also be directly linked with John C. Calhoun’s analysis of the division of the people – “the two great divisions of society are not the rich and poor, but white and black. And all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals”. An organization, like the police, which was created to provide a sense of safety and security to the American people, has been given so much power mixed with corruption and bias, that any action taken by police cannot be challenged. If the police murder a black man, the police, the media, and the people will dissect that black man’s life, particularly during the incident, to create him as a monster or a threat. A monster so scary that a trained, armed, and bullet-proof-vested white policeman would be so afraid, that he would have to plant 6 bullets to feel safe and in control of the situation. Upon death and search, the black man had no weapon. But white America will paint the picture as it is convenient, like did the judge for Florida vs. Zimmerman. And the black family will suffer, desperately pleading for the

support and aid of the people who hold the power. This is the cycle. To choose their dignity or their country.

Anderson's passage in *White Rage* directly supports Jasmyn Ward's introduction, where Ward recognizes that white oppression and crimes have seized the use of ropes for lynching, hound dogs for chasing, and classic patrol units for arresting, but it has developed into more violent and deadly methods by replacing "ropes with bullets. Hound dogs with German shepherds. A gray uniform with a bulletproof vest. Nothing is new" and the cycle continues. The repeated theme in Part II: Reckoning is calling for the attention of those to take account for their actions. Professor Keefer had shared something on the forums that has resonated in *The Fire This Time* – "tough love is one way to fight this injustice but having the 'enemy' eavesdrop on an epistolary novel is a powerful way to make them see what their ignorance and prejudice can do". I believe this is exactly Jasmyn Ward's strategy with Part I: Legacy and Part II: Reckoning of *The Fire This Time*. She is not calling for a change. In fact, she is not inserting her own opinions on what the reader should do. But she has compiled the passages of many contemporary writers who, on a whole, are able to provide narratives that our generation should reflect on.

Reading these three books in this particular progression can contribute a wealth of wisdom, obtainable by reading and understanding the historical context of each piece. It is beautiful that each message collects together to transform a message from hope, to reality, to our future. The contemporary writers are privileged with a time of relative peace and readers are able to notice the change in pace and tone with the writing. The prose style in *The Fire This Time* encourages a conversation between the writer and reader. The reading environment opens many doors for young people like myself to reflect on the historical, yet current reality that racism and oppression is still prevalent in America, and how. Thankfully, we are given a safe

space to explore the systematic American oppression that continues in a vicious, calculated cycle every day.

As we moved into *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, we shifted our focus from the particular themes of systematic and cyclical oppression to a more religious and cultural oppression. In *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, Nawal El Saadawi uses rhythm in language to formulate a sense of humor and discovery towards the disparate female oppression in Egypt by exposing the frauds manufactured by patriarchy; Nawal El Saadawi discovers that death is a certainty no matter a person's gender and creates a feeling of normalization between man and woman. El Saadawi explores this revelation as she recalls the day when she was dissecting a body of a dead man for her medical studies. This is an interesting shift in focus, but we are still examining how oppression plays a role across all cultures – whether it is in America or Egypt.

One must remember the historical time when El Saadawi is writing this memoir during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women were slaves to men and she was one of the first female medical practitioners, let alone one to expose systematic and cultural oppression. With this context, readers can already feel the sense of fear, revelations, and urgency. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the historical context is still relatively the same in regards to the systematic female oppression in Egypt. Examples of this systematic oppression are relayed during El Saadawi's interview with Professor Keefer along with the narratives of her other literature pieces. She advised that though times have slightly changed with the help of her powerful, revolutionary (and controversial) novels, plays, memoirs, and literature, the systematic female oppression continues in Egypt.

Nawal El Saadawi recalls a memory as a child when, “my mother was trembling with fright, looking up at him [doctor] beseechingly and reverently; my brother was terrified; my father was lying in bed begging for help. Medicine was a terrifying thing. It inspired respect, even veneration, in my mother and brother and father. I would become a doctor then... I'd make my

mother tremble with fright and look at me reverently; I'd make my brother terrified and my father beg me for help. I'd prove to nature that I could overcome the disadvantages of the frail body [female body] she'd clothed me in, with its shameful parts both inside and out" (El Saadawi 189). This context is significant for readers because El Saadawi illustrates the reality of the cultural female oppression in her country. The oppression is so culturally embedded, that it is unanimously accepted by all members of society; including her entire family that she is already able to recognize the injustice and disparity as a child. This passage demonstrates how severe the oppression is and how women are treated. El Saadawi rebels and combats this oppression by seizing the opportunity to achieve a status like a doctor, where she too could be respected and venerated. It would be, forcibly, a reverence regardless of her gender; because she would be a doctor, and people of her culture would have to beg for her aid in health, just like her father did.

Later when Nawal El Saadawi is a practitioner of medicine, she recalls dissecting the brain of a human being when she came to a realization. This directly links to her questions as a child about the differences between genders... and what did it mean that death is a certain commonality? "I felt it with the tips of my fingers; its surface was soft and convoluted, *just* like the rabbit's brain which I'd dug out of its little skull on the table earlier" (242). In this first section of the passage, Nawal El Saadawi's form focuses to create rich imagery for readers to begin engaging with her recollection. The structure is prose, as if she is casually speaking to you to describe the scene. She stresses the "*just*" to emphasize the comparison between a rabbit's brain and a human brain; there was none; they were both so alike – soft and convoluted. Her use of compound-complex sentences along with the denotative description of this natural scene aligns the readers' imagery with reality – one that anyone can imagine and *feel* it is real. This empowers her questions as a child, if there is truly anything different between a man and a woman. At the same time, her form also normalizes humans as they are. They are not majestic,

holy, or sanctified. Upon death and inspection, and death is certain, humans are just as much an animal like any other – male or female. What realization is El Saadawi coming to that she is writing with this style?

Upon setting the imagery and scene, El Saadawi begins to wonder “was it possible that *this* was the brain of a human being? Could *this* piece of moist tender flesh be the *mighty* human mind that had *triumphed* over nature and gone down into the bowels of the earth and up into orbit with the sun and moon, which could split rocks and move mountains and extract enough fire from atoms to destroy the world?” (242). Her form and rhythm in language is crucial because, although very lengthy in meter, it delivers a significant narrative. This section is written not as prose but rather like an unconscious thought – as if we were in her head, wondering with her, while visualizing the imagery she had created from the first section. We know that she now understands that death is a certain commonality as she pokes fun at the stupidity of patriarchy and female oppression. She continues to disarm patriarchy as she realizes that there truly is no difference between a man and a woman – they are all moist, tender flesh. Even in science and medicine, there is no distinction that makes a man worth more than a woman.

Nawal El Saadawi crafts this second part of this section by using compound-complex sentences almost in the form of a run-on. This is important to note as it is intentional just like how Baldwin had written similar sentences – they both allow for intricacy and elaboration. This is important to note as it is intentional just like how Baldwin had written similar sentences – they both allow for intricacy and elaboration. She goes to mock patriarchy and human kind that after all sorts of scientific achievements and marvels, that at the end of the day, there is no difference between genders that call for such systematic and cultural oppression to women. To emphasize on this mockery, she intentionally crafts a run-on sentence to continue, continue, and continue to list examples of man kind’s achievements. It is almost as though she is sad and cannot believe she is coming to the realization. There are no excuses to support female oppression.

Yet she keeps trying to list achievements to justify that there *must* be some sort of excuse if the oppression is so unanimously accepted and practice. There *must* be a reason! Has she come this far to discover nothing? No. With no science to support the oppression, it becomes clear to El Saadawi that oppression was merely manufactured and maintained by men to make women their slaves – just like her fate as a child when her grandmother and mother had her display her body in a cream dress for a man to use. She has learned this. And she is now free to think outside of this oppression, for there are no real bars to keep her imprisoned anymore.

To further solidify this newfound realization, El Saadawi recalls “I seized the scalpel and cut the brain up into pieces, then the pieces into still more pieces. I looked and felt and probed and found nothing. Only a piece of soft flesh which disintegrated under my fingers” (247). This last section of the passage is just as significant as the others because all three parts contribute to a brilliant and unique form in narration. The voice of the passage develops from the first section as her physical actions at practice, which can be imagined and felt as real, to the second section as her unconscious thoughts while performing her practice, then the third section concluding her realizations as a third party, observing her scene from the outside. I appreciate how Nawal El Saadawi develops the voice in narration throughout this passage because it is innovative and the sequencing in the voice allows readers to really imagine and walk with her in her memories. There is also a unique rhythm that can be found in the second sentence. “I *looked* and *felt* and *probed* and *found nothing*” (247). The rhythm is almost staccato-like and helps transform her sadness and disbelief from section two of the passage into a pleasant astonishment.

When comparing the form in language and sequencing compared to authors like James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and the various authors in Jesmyn Wards’ *The Fire This Time*, we discover that Nawal El Saadawi is quite the artist. She introduces a new depth in imagery, scenery, and drama in language that doesn’t have to use sophisticated vocabulary to paint the



picture. Instead, El Saadawi crosses the very real aspects of humanity – death – with humor, mockery, discovery, revelation, and astonishment. She uses language as music. Though there is a lot that cannot be dissected due to the translation from her original Arabic writing to English, readers can none-the-less feel a brilliant sense of drama, unique sequencing and voice in narration, and extremely rich imagery that allows readers to feel and walk with her through her memoirs. Nawal El Saadawi successfully uses rhythm with language to formulate a sense of humor and revelation towards the female oppression by creating the sense of normalization between man and woman in a lighter manner than Baldwin, Coates, and the authors of *The Fire This Time*. Although the focus in themes are different, they are still similarly in regards to oppression and El Saadawi uses her artistic talents to relay her message in an innovative fashion.

The distinct difference in narrative between Nawal El Saadawi and the other authors is the type of oppression that is being experienced. Baldwin, Coates, and Ward all illustrate the systematic oppression of the black body, whereas El Saadawi examines on the oppression of the female body. In *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, Nawal el Saadawi is equal like other females in the Egyptian system. One could argue that she has a community that she belongs to that is equal across the board within that niche. However, the shocking difference to me is that there is no one type of oppressor – like the literal and metaphorical white man to the black man. El Saadawi's oppressor is all people; everyone she knew; her family, her friends, her colleagues, and the Egyptian system; both culturally and systematically. The fate of a female (note I mention specifically female, not just woman) in her upbringing is to be married to an adult man at the discretion of her family. Nawal El Saadawi remembers the day when her grandmother secretly and intently whispered to her mother. The two spoke like an advisor to a president. For her mother to then order El Saadawi to change into her cream colored dress and model her body to a man in their living room. She was still a child when her family sought it time to wed her off so

she may follow her fate – to be a body to please a man and nothing else; to birth children, to cook and feed the fat man; to be nothing more than a body for pleasure and food. This fate was commonly accepted and maintained by all people across the Egyptian system. So much so that her own cousin would have sexually assaulted her for his own pleasure, because *this* was okay in the system; because *that* is all she was to be – pleasure.

This type of oppression is starkly different from Baldwin, Coates' and Ward's passages. The pleasure from oppression of their bodies were primarily reserved to produce riches. But at least the black body could turn to other black bodies for support or to continue the cycle. Regardless of where Nawal El Saadawi turned for shelter or wisdom, she was always met with the same oppression – by both males and females. There was no escape. The only shelter El Saadawi would be able to find is if she succumbed to this cycle of oppression and joined other females in slavery. She rebels and combats this using her depth in imagery, ability to cross aspects of humanity, talented sense of drama and unique sequencing and voicing in narration. Her brilliance in using language like music sets her apart from the other authors as she is able to paint pictures for readers. This is why her literary work is revolutionary. It is not just the message, but how it is delivered. During Nawal El Saadawi's interview with Professor Keefer, she describes how facts and fiction are one. Sometimes you can learn more from fiction than the facts because the imagination comes in and it is very rich. This creativity relates directly to memories that authors remember in their life as they are able to get rid of shame and secrets. Nawal El Saadawi mentions a person cannot be free if they have secrets. She uses this to her advantage and sets herself free as she fights for her equality.

I found great pleasure reading through *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* and reflecting on Nawal El Saadawi's literary work. Living in an era where a movement for rights in any aspect is encouraged, El Saadawi's writing style had encouraged me to be more open and creative in my own struggle. Looking for solutions my own way but reminding myself to ask the right questions

as to not get lost in the pursuit of my Dream. Additionally, Nawal El Saadawi's brilliant sense of drama and ability to convey it in writing helped prepare me for Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*. Similar to El Saadawi, Rahimi embraces creativity, imagination, and art in his writing. He takes advantage of his artistic perspective from his experience as filmmaker to beautifully reveal the shocking revelations of Afghan women and men in *The Patience Stone*. Rahimi also explores themes of oppression that are similar to El Saadawi in regards to cultural and gender.

*The Patience Stone* is a novel but is written in the form of a play. He explores the hypocrisies of the Afghan culture, particularly prevalent amongst men, in subjects that are considered dangerously taboo – sex, desire, and pride. In *The Patience Stone*, we read through wonderfully crafted scene descriptions and monologues in the perspective of an unnamed woman who is caring for her comatose husband. Her predicament is the result of the man's foolish tussle over honor. Honor for what? Honor for his country; honor for his religion; honor for his family; honor for himself; perhaps not honor at all, just foolish pride. It is through his comatose state that we are revealed the secrets of the oppressed women in Afghanistan, which can be interpreted as the voice of millions of other women like her in our world today. Rahimi's fantastic sense of cinematic scenery and visual imagery allows readers to genuinely feel the cries of this unnamed woman as we yearn for her freedom from the comatose man's chains.

The patience stone, known to be a magical black stone, absorbs the plight of those who confide in it. It is believed in folklore that the stone explodes upon absorbing too much hardship and pain. As said in the introduction by Khaled Hosseini, Afghan women are continually assaulted by the religious, marital, and cultural norms cultivated by the brutality of men, leaving women "with no recourse but to absorb without complaint, like a patience stone" (Rahimi 17). In this play, Atiq Rahimi harnesses and reverses the role of the patience stone by offering a chance to the woman to finally be the one to assault – and the man the one to absorb. This narrative is already controversial in itself, as it is one that men of Afghan culture, and others

alike, are too ashamed to acknowledge. But this humility is precisely what transcends beauty and thrill in such war-torn scenes. The play begins with the unnamed woman already at a state of having absorbed too much hardship and pain. She is desperate, pleading for her god and religiously reciting the Koran as she despairingly thumbs through prayer beads. 99 cycles. One, two. One, two. She prays and cares for her man. Soon she has had enough, soon she is ready to explode.

Throughout the book, readers can notice a shift in the personality of the unnamed woman as she is caring for her comatose husband. She transforms from the loyal, righteous wife to one who begins to question and reveal resentment of her husband's inability to resist the call to arms, desire to be a hero, and sacrifice of his family for his own pride. Perhaps she is not righteous herself, but how does one know her secrets? Through the art of oppression, men in Afghanistan supposedly maintain their women as pure but do not treat them as such. Atiq Rahimi shatters this illusion. The woman begins to reveal her oppression as she recalls that she has been married for ten years. To her own surprise, she realized she had not seen his face a single time until three years after the ceremony. This "ceremony", if you wish to call it, was a marriage ceremony that proceeded with a photo of the man's face as he was absent, at war. This is important to note because Rahimi already details the underlying stigma of women in Afghan culture – they are merely seen to be bodies, reserved for men, and to preserve their innocence is to honor the man. They have not even met! When they do meet, nothing changes. The man proceeds to sit down next to her with no expression or desire. He sits as all men do. With the purpose to be served. Nothing less, everything more. Systematic and engraved into their religious culture, this was all so normal for the woman. But now he is comatose; she has time to reflect and speak her truth. She explodes.

The woman recalls when she discussed her grandmother's story with her father-in-law. The answer to this story supposedly provides the key to happiness in life. One day, the

woman's father-in-law shared what he declared to be the answer to the story – “As in life, my daughter, for this story to have a happy ending there must be a sacrifice. In other words, somebody's misfortune. Never forget, every piece of happiness must be paid for by two misfortunes” (100). He later suggests that “the story requires a murder. But who must be killed?” then asks “who do you wish to see happy, and alive?” (100). Initially enthused and grateful that her father-in-law had found the answer to the notoriously ambiguous story, she is quickly observed through Rahimi's narration and sequencing in her voice that this answer comes to haunt her during the care of her comatose husband.

She resonates with suppressed desires, fulminates with hate, and roars with her secrets – all geared to disarm the comatose man of his witless pride and honor. What a man he is indeed; dumbly laying with his mouth half open, a tube stuck through his mouth dripping sugar and salt. What a man he is indeed; eyes parted open, vacant, dragging, staring at the rotting ceiling. What a man he is indeed; numb from pain, incapable of emotion, his disability to feel. What a man he is indeed; shot in the neck by a teenage boy, spared by god to not feel pain, and at the mercy of his oppressed, loyal wife. He is reduced to a patience stone, forced to absorb assaults by the woman – just like all women have at the hands of their husbands. Atiq Rahimi reverently dissipates the line that segregates the husband's oppression with the woman's desire for freedom.

Readers can observe how the woman's desire for freedom feeds into her voice. As each day passes with her care of the comatose man, she repeats the same mundane tasks to try to keep the man comfortable and at the least, alive. 99 cycles. One two, one two. With each day that expires and each task repeated, the woman slowly slips into insanity, or rather her clarity, for freedom from the pain of having to tend to the spiritless man. The Koran, her culture, and her society all call for her to remain vigilant in her care for the man. She is loyal. He does not react. 99 cycles. One two, one two. The woman reminds herself of her father-in-law's response. Her

grandmother's story, now comparably her own story, requires a murder in exchange for happiness. Similarly, her husband's war required murder for freedom. His war is over. And only through her own voice does she realize that her husband's murder is what will allow her to be happy. She begins her assaults.

It would be against the Koran, her culture, and society for her to mercy-kill her husband even in his state of comatose. She'd been forbidden by what she knows. But she flirts with this idea and why she cannot do it. This self-pressure that we feel from the woman demonstrates the love she has for her daughters, the father (the man), and the mother (herself). She is clearly at ends with herself. She has never had this much power to be the one to vocalize and assault with her words. She revolts – is this what it feels like?! Regardless, she continues to repeat mundane tasks in the wake of war. While insurgents raid her town, pillage and murder her neighbors, the woman continues to practice her love; love for her daughters, love for herself as a follower of the Koran, and love for her husband as her duty as the wife. She struggles to find reasons to care for her husband as she frequently implores god and her man to show her the way. She continues to loyally tend to him as she still has notions of respect to his position in their culture. Rahimi brilliantly dissects this love by emancipating the unnamed woman through her self-realization in truth and honesty. When she is finally able to accept her secrets and share them with her patience stone, she reaches closer to freedom but is conflicted.

The woman is conflicted because of what she knows. She was raised to know that she is a woman in Afghanistan; that she is a body to serve a man; her desires to be equal has essentially been proscribed through systematic religious oppression; a conflict that derives from misplaced loyalty to her Koran. It is tragic that the same system that she believes is liberating her is the same one that oppresses her. We can interject the father-in-law's foreshadowing that for her story to have a happy ending, a misfortune is needed. This first part in his foreshadowing is fulfilled by the man's comatose state and the empty deliverance from the Koran. It is

unfortunate that the man is neither dead or alive and that the woman's fate seemingly resides in caring for this man. The woman is pressured by her pledge to the teachings of the Koran and she does not yet see that this fulfillment in the foreshadowing actually opens the door for her freedom – the Koran is not her savior, it is one of her oppressors.

She reveals many secrets to her patience stone. Secrets of how she had been raped by him; secrets of his incompetence; of her oppression; of honor and pride; of love and desire; of sacrifice and duty; the truth about their children; with stories previously untold and thoughts left unexplored. She feels as though she is going mad because what sane woman – in their oppressive culture – would dare to vocalize such things? Through Rahimi's sequencing in voice and his creative narrations, we can visualize the woman's transformation through her thoughts. It's this taunting time of desperation that she is reminded of the second part in her father-in-law's foreshadowing – "The story requires a murder. But who must be killed?... who do you wish to see happy, and alive? (100). As she confides in her comatose man, she comes to the realization and declares "I'm not under the spell of a demon. What I'm saying, what I'm doing, is dictated by the voice from on high, is guided by that voice. And the voice coming out of my throat is a voice buried for thousands of years" (133).

Through her self-realization, not only does the unnamed woman disarm the oppression of the man, but she also disarms the oppression of the Koran. "If all religion is to do with revelation, the revelation of a truth, then, my *sang-e saboor* (translation – patience stone), our story is a religion too!" (139). I enjoyed that Atiq Rahimi was able to add this humor in despair – implying that although the woman has come to a revelation and state of empowerment, she still arrived with conflict. As foreshadowed by the father-in-law, happiness must come with sacrifice and misfortune. Her reality had to be stripped of all things she was raised to systematically abide by. And her quote is an attempt at humor to mock this revelation.

All her secrets have been absorbed by her patience stone and it is ready to explode, just like she was. After absorbing so much hardship and pain through her revelations, the man finally reacts. She revels with joy, "It's... it's a miracle! It's the Resurrection!" (140). Now fully understanding what her father-in-law meant, she also knows that someone must be murdered for her ultimate happiness, whether it be herself or her man. She is happy to see the man move, as if alive again, but happier that her opportunity to be free has come. The man is filled with rage and she gladly allows the man to throw her against a wall, she does not resist. She will either die at the hands of the man, setting her free from the pain of having to tend to this man, or she can kill the man, setting her free from his oppression. Either way, there is a sacrifice and there is freedom. "The woman looks at him ecstatically. Her head is touching the khanjar. Her hand snatches it. She screams and drives it into the man's heart." Again, without resistance, "He bangs her head against the floor, and then, brusquely, wrings her neck. The woman breathes out. The man breathes in. The woman closes her eyes... The man – with the khanjar deep in his heart – lies down on his mattress" (143). She is free.

I thought it would be interesting to try and explore the narrative that was first introduced with the father-in-law's answer to the grandmother's story. It was interesting to follow the woman's development once she remembered the answer. I observed this answer to be a foreshadowing that had actually begun from the very beginning of the book. For happiness in a tragic story to be obtained, there must be a sacrifice or misfortune. Furthermore, in the particular story that had been shared, someone must be murdered for the sake of true happiness for an abundance of reasons. In the specific example of the story, "if you are on the daughter's side, your love for yourself prevents you from imagining the daughter's suicide. In the same way, love for the father doesn't allow you to imagine that the daughter could accept the marriage and then kill her own father in the marital bed on the wedding night. Finally, love for the mother stops you from considering the murder of the queen in order that the daughter can live with the king and



conceal the truth from him. In the same way, if I, as a father, imagined an end to this story, it would be the strict application of the law. I would order the beheading of the queen, the princess... to ensure that the traitors were punished and the secret of incest buried forevermore” (101). The tragedy is that inevitably, someone must die for the sake of happiness.

Comparing *The Patience Stone* with the previous books I've read this semester was challenging. The first three books I read, *Between the World and Me*, *The Fire Next Time*, and *The Fire This Time* all explore a similar type of oppression that is a bit more transparent than *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* and *The Patience Stone*. Particularly, Coates, Baldwin, and Ward, respectively, all focused on key elements that contribute to a ravenous American machine and the cycle of oppression of the black body – particularly prevalent the United States. These authors provided a plethora of specific incidents in the past, time frame in history, metaphors and examples to illustrate the continual cycle of the oppression. The books, whether in the form of novel, epistolary, or essay compilation, could all be dissected thanks to its technical approach in delivering the author's message.

Similarly, Nawal El Saadawi approached *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* with great technique in her writing. However, El Saadawi used opportunities to insert instances to develop visual imagery, a sense of drama, and unique sequencing in the character's voice. Additionally, El Saadawi set the tone of narration by including humor and normalizing humans as they are. I found that Nawal El Saadawi was more successful in achieving this normalization of humans compared to Coates, Baldwin, and Ward, but their message was relatively the same – that the pleasure from oppression of their bodies were primarily reserved to produce riches.

When comparing that with the technique and message in *The Patience Stone*, we can observe a remarkable difference in technique and a notable change in the message. Atiq Rahimi has experience as a filmmaker and capitalizes from his ability to create playwright. This includes narrations and preparing scenes that engage readers in heavy visual imagery along

with an incredible sense of drama. It became apparent that strict technical writing and citing specific examples in history were not necessary to relay a message regarding controversial, melancholy circumstances. After all, he sets the scene as “somewhere in Afghanistan or elsewhere”.

Not only was his ability for playwriting noteworthy, but his ability to give characters a unique voice was impressive. I found myself dissecting the quotes of unnamed characters in *The Patience Stone*, immersed with what they said – as if they had said it like a profound philosopher. And *none* of the characters in this book had any names. Rahimi’s ability to pull readers into this kind of creative environment was extremely useful to convey his message. It became easier for readers to interpret the message and essentially foreshadow the message before anything in the book points directly towards it; readers can *feel* the writing, they can *live* in the moment with scene, and furthermore are able to dissect the voices of characters without having to even know their names. Remarkable! Anyone is able to pick up *The Patience Stone* and engage deeply with Rahimi’s deep sense in drama and imagery. His message can be ambiguous in application, but his theory is applicable and comparable with all authors so far – for happiness, someone must be sacrificed.

It is tragic in the sense that this predicament could be avoided, but it appears that many circumstances come to this conclusion with the state of life – whether current or past. Someone must be sacrificed for happiness. This theme of happiness is inevitably correlated with the theme of the machine and the theme of the cyclical pursuit of the Dream. The sad truth is that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer – the reality that good fortune only presents itself to those who can afford it, whereas there is an abundance of bad fortune for those who cannot. But why is this the case?

I like to reference Ta-Nehisi Coates’ allegory of the mountain and valley. Coates describes that the destiny for a black person is to reside “down in the valley”, for “a mountain is

not a mountain if there is nothing below” (105). In this example, the black person is a symbol that represents any person who is oppressed – regardless of skin color, gender, and nationality. This allegory is applicable to the theme of happiness because it explains that for there to be any rich person, there must be a poor person. The rich can only get rich if the poor get poorer. Someone had to determine who gets rich or richer, it is not necessarily because there isn't enough to go around, but essentially to categorize people and distribute power accordingly. A consistent theme throughout these books is that this categorization and distribution of power is always corrupt, often decided by the select few who determine themselves worthy.

Due to this, I have come to understand that there is the unbreakable reason that the cycle will continue to repeat due to the systematic structure of oppression which ensures that someone is below as long as someone is above. It was intentionally engineered this way; the theme of happiness and sacrifice; the theme of the machine. Even for those in the middle to be happy, someone must be below them and suffer misfortunes; that person must be sacrificed so those above can reap the benefits. Comparably, this fundamental theory reverberates in Coates' *Between the World and Me*, Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Ward's *The Fire This Time*, and El Saadawi's *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*. And overall, Atiq Rahimi demonstrates brilliant drama, imagery, sequencing in narration, implementation of scenery, and a delicate balance between the depth of the story and the characters.

The first few books were focused on systematic oppression of the black body. The next ones on religious and cultural oppression of women. But *Saturday*, by Ian McEwan, seems to focus on the unconscious oppression of the mind and self-oppression. In regards to themes, Ian McEwan writes Henry Perowne's character from a perspective of privilege – a status that is lacking from the suffering characters of the previous books. It makes me question if unconscious oppression of the mind and self-oppression are reserved for those who are privileged enough to have the status, money, power, or time to think about self-oppression.

Most of the other characters are preoccupied trying to survive – physically for most, mentally for some, spiritually for others. Their struggle derives from the oppression that has been brought onto them by people who are privileged. Before examining this theme, readers must first understand McEwan and Perowne's character.

Ian McEwan's demonstrates an incredible ability to intertwine classic, and intentionally tedious, literary language with modern poetic narrations. His mastery in the English language helps craft the dramatic structure in *Saturday* by using precise, rich details to extensively and delicately narrate scenes and scenarios. The time in the book is set during a particular Saturday in February 2003. Henry Perowne is introduced as our protagonist. He is brilliant yet unknowingly troubled. A foreshadowing. On page 18, Perowne rejects the parable of Schrodinger's cat as a thought experiment because it did not make any logical sense to him. The famous thought experiment is described as "a cat, Schrodinger's cat, hidden from view in a covered box, is either still alive, or has just been killed by a randomly activated hammer hitting a vial of poison. Until the observer lifts the cover from the box, both possibilities, alive cat and dead cat, exist side by side, in parallel universes, equally real. At the point which the lid is lifted from the box and the cat is examined, a quantum wave of probability collapses" (McEwan18). Perowne rejects this parable because it seems beyond the requirements of proof. Readers learn that he requires a certain level of exactness and logic – similar to McEwan's literary approach.

But does Henry Perowne reject the parable because he is afraid to learn the truth, rather than his need for exactness and logic? Like Schrodinger's Cat, whatever is awaiting his discovery, "what then collapses will be his own ignorance. Whatever the score, it is already chalked up" (18). Maybe Perowne is afraid to derive from the linear, logical exactness and oppresses himself with deliberate ignorance. McEwan uses this quotation to set a foreshadowing of Perowne's character and also to provoke readers to question whether we participate in this kind of deliberate ignorance. At the end of Chapter 1, McEwan narrates "in

darkness...in a hurry...without preamble... Now he is freed from thought, from memory, from the passing seconds and from the state of the world. Sex is a different medium, refracting time and sense, a biological hyperspace as remote from conscious existence as dreams, or as water is from air. As his mother used to say, another element" (52). Here, an exhausted Perowne is reminded of the unique feeling of floating between consciousness and unconsciousness; a different medium; one that refracts time and senses, sort of like another element; transcendence. McEwan teases readers in this passage by hinting that maybe Henry Perowne comes to a revelation that the moment during sex that frees him from his thoughts, memory, time, and influences of the world might be the clarity he needs to obtain the courage to discover his Schrodinger's Cat. But there is a long way to go.

He is dutifully pragmatic and, like his rejection of Schrodinger's Cat, has trouble being theoretical. Perowne has an obsessive need to dissect and understand scenarios with an often-scientific approach before reaching a conclusion. Like McEwan, Perowne's brain requires calculated observations so that he may feel like he exists in the natural world, that he is real. This requirement and his desperate inclination to try to remain real is actually what pushes his character into frequent artificial scenes. These scenes are not natural and vary from other characters in *Saturday*.

Perowne is surrounded by a gifted family. They are all brilliantly talented; his son, a blues guitarist; his daughter, a newly published poet; and his wife, a successful media lawyer; they all require a heightened level of creativity – one that Perowne cannot seem to access. Early on in the book, McEwan implies that Perowne is aware of this. Perowne attempts to wean into the fiction genre with the help of his daughter; he never understood the purpose of fiction. His own success was found through science with calculations, structured observations, and strategic reactions. So, readers can determine that this is an obstacle to Perowne's methodical, realist brain. Interestingly, Perowne experiences a consistent lack of success as he struggles to

detach himself from practical realism. He believes that having a criterion of exactness will provide the best foundation to make way for a reaction. And perhaps believes it's the only way he can feel grounded in the reality of the world.

Ian McEwan challenges Perowne by placing him in scenarios where relying on calculated observations and methodical dissections of events may not lead to the all-too-familiar success that he is used to. And he consistently fails to succeed throughout the day. A perfect example is when Perowne is stuck in traffic. Is he thinking about his squash game, his son's show, or their family dinner? Does he think about the protestors and what they might be protesting? Do they even matter to him? What is their desire? The protestors all exist in his physical world, yet they are absent – just like Schrodinger's Cat. He focuses on only one reality – his own self.

McEwan boldly touches on this very struggle later in the book. While describing Perowne, McEwan writes "he can't feel his way past the iron weight of the actual to see beyond the boredom of a traffic tailback, or the delay to which he himself is contributing, or the drab commercial hopes of a parade of shops he's been stuck beside for fifteen minutes. He doesn't have the lyric gift to see beyond it – he's a realist, and can never escape" (172). Perowne is a steadfast realist who still struggles to expand his mind to the world of "what if" or "maybe" – to theory. Similar to his inability to comprehend Schrodinger's Cat, Perowne is unable to comprehend that the real world can, and often does, exist alongside an alternate world. In particular scenarios throughout the book, Perowne's point of view can be compared as the real world, while everyone else's point of view would be compared as the alternate world. But Ian McEwan makes it a point that they both exist at the same time when he sets scenes when Perowne is suddenly in the artificial scene and everyone else is in the natural scene. Perowne's obsessiveness to be exact in practice lead his brain to naturally process scenarios as if the real world is reserved for himself and his beliefs – whether in science, politics, life, or spirit – that

whatever he knows must be true. He is truly an exact and precise intellectual. Although Perowne is able to appreciate those who are unlike him, he himself is unable to transcend out of his singular darkness. Readers can observe that Perowne is the one who exists in an alternate world while everyone else – who has the ability to reason in theory – exists in the same world.

In a way, Perowne could be seen both as the oppressed and the oppressor. Most of the time, it appears that he oppresses himself. Sadly, Perowne also oppresses those who are not as acutely intelligent as he is. Perowne lives in his own world because of this. As a result, his brain inherently dictates what the scenario *must be* rather than accepting what it *could be*. But he lacks the confidence to confront those scenarios to learn the truth. This is ironic because Perowne is a successful brain surgeon and to reach his level of success, he would have needed to learn and master the truth in science. Perowne is brilliant but ignorant – possibly even naïve. In a world that is so familiar yet unknown to Perowne, he empowers himself by thinking his calculated exactness is the only truth. He struggles when evaluating this truth.

In this regard, I return back to the question whether unconscious oppression of the mind and self-oppression are reserved for those who are privileged enough to have the status, money, power, or time to think about self-oppression. Most of the other characters in *Saturday*, along with the writers and characters from the *Between the World and Me*, *The Fire Next Time*, *The Fire This Time*, *Memoir of a Woman Doctor*, and *The Patience Stone* are preoccupied trying to survive while fighting physical, mental, or spiritual oppression. They did not have the luxurious time to contemplate about himself like Henry Perowne did in *Saturday*. Depending on the perspective that is taken, it could be argued that Henry Perowne oppressed himself but continuously did so because there was no other imminent threat or danger to have to be considered first. It was only when there was an imminent threat to himself and his family that he was able to finally transcend out of his darkness and find the ability to be imaginative to succeed

in situations. This was an interesting theme of oppression to explore compared to the other themes of oppression like the machine or the cyclical pursuit of the Dream.

Compared to other authors like Coates, Baldwin, Ward, El Saadawi, and Rahimi, Ian McEwan demonstrates an exceedingly impressive knowledge in the English language and mastery in grammar and writing. This skill is not without talent. I have come to notice that the way McEwan writes is considerably different compared to all other authors. Particularly how the style can be used to create visual imagery, accompany words to deliver denotative meanings, or provide further depth in the sense of drama.

Ian McEwan's narration of scenes and scenarios is innovative because they are written with a combination of complete third person, limited third person, and stream-of-consciousness techniques. His ability to detail scenes without dramatic monologues, describe then set up scenarios, and finally execute dialogues in the first person is unorthodox. He typically describes scenes using complete third person, then sets up scenarios using a mix of limited third person and streams of conscious thoughts. He completes scenes by delivering dialogues between characters in normal first person. Interestingly, particular conscious thoughts are not written in dialogue but rather in the scenario narration, in third person, to help develop what readers perceive of the characters.

In the realm of drama, narration, and sequencing, Ian McEwan could be compared with Nawal El Saadawi and Atiq Rahimi. Both El Saadawi and Rahimi were incredibly innovative with their dramatic structure. Their narrations were fantastically imaginative and could provide intense visual imagery. Rahimi, in particular, was extremely skilful in narrating scenes thanks to his experience as a filmmaker. All three authors have a talented ability to narrate scenes and describe scenarios. A distinction amongst the three, though, is that El Saadawi and Rahimi did not require lengthy, calculated descriptions of scenes like McEwan. Freedom for the reader to imagine is imperative in a fiction-style book. I believe that McEwan had failed to provide



freedom to readers due to his overbearing need to intricately design each passage, sentence, and sequencing. This lack of this freedom was a direct result of McEwan's exactness, ironically or maybe intentionally, like Perowne.

All of the previous books touch on a theme of oppression and the Dream. The consequences of the pursuit of the Dream always reveals the same conclusion to the protagonist – that the Dream is flawed because of oppression. *Between the World and Me*, *The Fire Next Time*, *The Fire This Time*, *Memoir of a Woman Doctor*, and *The Patience Stone* all focus on the Global Dream – the pursuit of equality and desire for freedom. In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald expands on a derivative of the Dream, the American Dream, and attributes it as an unattainable expectation.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is praised for having a significant amount symbolism and themes revolving around the American Dream. *The Great Gatsby* is written from a perspective of privilege. Fitzgerald attributed characters' unattainable expectations in both love and Dreams to the Jazz Age's characteristics of carefree period of wealth, freedom, and youth. These characteristics are largely depicted in the theme of the American Dream but are also predominant in them theme of love. Established early on in the book, the theme of love acts as a foreshadowing for the American Dream.

On page 13 of the Kindle edition, Catherine explains to Nick that neither Tom or Myrtle can stand the person they are married to – “Neither of them can stand the person they're married to... Can't *stand* them... Why go on living with them if they can't stand them?” This is when Nick learns that Tom and Myrtle are having an affair. Both characters were thought to be in happy their marriages. And they *should* be. After all, their marriages were calculated. But they are not. And the ironic, precise reason for that is because their marriages were calculated. The theme of love in *The Great Gatsby* flirts with the flaws of this calculation – it attributes the failure in love to the calculated decisions made to pursue an object rather than actual love.

There are two marriages focused in *The Great Gatsby* – a marriage between Tom and Daisy and a marriage between George and Myrtle. Both of these marriages are loveless as a result of the calculated decisions to marry one another for a gain in status. “I married him because I thought he was a gentleman, I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn’t fit to lick my shoe” says Myrtle, about her marriage with George. Her marriage was an attempt to acquire a status and improve her social class instead of a pursuit in actual love. She quickly comes to regret her marriage and has an affair with Tom instead.

This particular theme of love is a foreshadowing of the unattainable American Dream that is later focused on by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The American Dream refers to the promise of wealth and success with the notion that anything is possible as long as one works hard for the status. Literally, Gatsby is a character who pursues this dream but inevitably fails to succeed because he is still unaccepted by the socioeconomic elites he wishes to be a part of. Metaphorically, Gatsby pursues this dream in his quest to once-and-for-all acquire his princess, Daisy, where he also fails. In both story arcs, Gatsby never achieves the dreams he desires due to his conflict with the theme of love – similar to the two marriages.

The American Dream is inherently tied to the theme of love in the way that a loveless pursuit is one that will end with a loveless result. Gatsby’s success in his American Dream was denied because he, as “new money”, was never accepted by elites like “old money”. Although Gatsby had acquired a flamboyant amount of money, his desire was never to live life like the extravagantly wealthy. Instead, he had an ulterior motive. Thus, he could never truly be a person of extravagant wealth – like “old money”. Gatsby’s dream was flawed from the start as his pursuit was a loveless desire for the object – a social status – over the love of the subject – genuinely being the type of person who has and lives in this status.

Gatsby also fails in his pursuit of Daisy in a similar fashion. Instead of actually pursuing Daisy with love of her as a person, Gatsby approached Daisy as if she was an unattainable

object. His pursuit was compromised from the start due to his focus in his real-life metaphor. Gatsby focused on pursuing the object of love – something unattainable – rather than the subject of love – the person. Gatsby drowns in his fiery desire to have what was once unattainable and becomes obsessed with a need to demonstrate that he is worthy for a social status. As a result, Gatsby sets himself up for failures and lost sight on what was important. As a result, his pursuit was loveless and ultimately could not attain Daisy.

These two arcs are relational to one another. They flirt on the idea that that one character's calculated decision attributes to another character's inevitable demise. Although Tom and Daisy's marriage is a calculated decision, it prevents Gatsby from having a real chance at attaining his pursuit in Daisy, Gatsby's American Dream. The irony is – though that may be true, Gatsby had already prevented himself from attaining his dream by not being focused on the subject in the theme of love. Perhaps F. Scott Fitzgerald wanted to convey that the American Dream, or any dream, is an unattainable expectation to begin with. Interestingly, many times this expectation is set by the protagonist.

A message to all readers is that this expectation is controllable and malleable to our own desires. Perhaps a revelation might be that a humble approach to a moderate dream could be fruitful and that an undirected approach to an untamed dream could be fruitless. Maybe this is the direction that is needed for the Global Dream. A humble, moderate approach. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* concluded the first half of this semester beautifully with this message and the fantastic dramatization and visual creativity in the book. It was the perfect book to conclude the explored themes of oppression, the theme of the machine, the theme of happiness, sacrifice, and love. My perspective has certainly been expanded thanks to the unique and diverse cultures that were explored throughout each book. The most interesting observation I found was that every scene and any scenario could be dissected and there would

always be some sort of correlation between the theme of the Dream and the theme of oppression. They were rarely without one another.

Although we conclude the first half of literature with an all-too-familiar cycle of oppression and the Dream, readers should be encouraged when learning that the second half of literature follows a far more creative and flavorful measure in writing style. It can be observed that the lens through which readers interpret literature dramatically changes from the first half to the second half of Major 20<sup>th</sup> Century Writers. We notice that the various authors transition from writing with a sense of purpose to a sense of livelihood. While the first half of literature focused on technicality, exactness, precision, and objectives in writing, the second half of literature focuses on the readers' experience and their senses; emotions, feelings, sounds, flavors, and colors. A peculiar difference to the former is how this type of creative writing encourages readers to tap into their emotions and live in the moment while reading – there are many colors that are offered. But in the former, there is only black and white. I have observed that writing objectively, with technicality and exactness, often makes a book stale. Whereas writing with a sense of livelihood, and nothing more, often makes a book more appetizing. The first book that stood out to me precisely like this was *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad.

It is interesting reading from the perspective of Joseph Conrad considering he had written *Heart of Darkness* in 1899 – during a time when slavery was common, when the world was relatively still undiscovered or unknown, and when the knowledge of men was, expectedly, restricted and bound to their own ignorance and naivety. A frequent theme that Conrad touched on was the theme of god, obsessive behavior, and hypocrisy. All these themes were heavily influenced by Conrad's own writing. Joseph Conrad writes with authority when writing in the perspective of protagonist Charlie Marlow, a British seaman. Conrad was a seaman himself and his obsession of travelling to the dark places in Africa played its part in this character.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad projects himself as Marlow. It becomes apparent that Charlie Marlow considers Africa to be quite the opposite of Europe. To Marlow, Africa is a wild, untamed world, before civilization, where humans seemed, questionably, inhuman. To his own defense, Marlow is accustomed to “look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster” (Conrad 26). Conrad’s quick insert of shackles and a conquered monster demonstrates how prevalent the practice of slavery still was during the time *Heart of Darkness* was written. It is important to note that even civilized worlds at the time still considered slaves as inhuman – they were merely shackled monsters. As much as Marlow is intrigued with the so-called monsters of Africa, the writing suggests that Marlow is more intrigued with himself, almost obsessively.

The rest of the passage is an example of Marlow’s inner thoughts. Speaking for the same person, Conrad’s sentences and descriptions are distended and incessant; almost having a self-involved and obsessive need to explain his own understanding or wisdom. With this style of writing, readers can make the comparison that the author’s writing habits can attribute directly to the protagonist’s personality. It is needless to make a comparison whether this writing style is good or bad, that is subjective none-the-less, but it is interesting to observe the protagonist’s character development in this circumstance. Marlow explains his intrigue – “but there – there you could look at the monstrous and free” (26) – as though the slaves he knows back at home were never humans to begin with, still just monstrous in their roots. He continues, “it was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly.”

As readers follow Marlow’s progression in his own thoughts, it can be observed that Marlow finds thrill in provoking himself with the thought that these people could actually and

perhaps be humans – just like a trail of thrill than can be followed when Conrad writes. We can recognize that Marlow might have some sort of fear that the human bodies he sees might be equal to his human body. Here he struggles with his ego. This is the part of the book where I noticed that Marlow might be attributing himself as a character who struggles with the theme of god. Perhaps Marlow had thought of himself as a god in some way. Maybe that is why he is fearful to have suspicion of “their not being inhuman”. Marlow is afraid that he could be just as inhumanly human too if he howled or leaped, or spun, or made horrid faces. He justifies, “yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you – you so remote from the night of the first ages – could comprehend.” (26).

Contrary to his initial observation, Marlow tries to justify judgements that were influenced by his fears, ego, and complex of his self-image as a god through the process of human logic. It is almost as though Marlow is intrigued with himself and the fact that he has made these observations of other human bodies and made progress to admit aspects to himself. Note that Marlow does not reference them as human people, but just as monsters, and the closest they can get to human existence is the doubt of them being inhuman in the first place. We can notice how his character progresses – Marlow, considering his time’s culture, is now surprisingly willing to admit this introspection to himself. And to his credit, Marlow does try to bridge the chasm between privileged, civilized, and developed humans like himself with unprivileged, uncivilized, and underdeveloped monsters by arguing that there is some sort, even if faintest, of a trace that connects the civilized humans to their beginnings, perhaps the African people he is observing now.

Embellished with his self-flattery, Marlow continues “and why not? The mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future”. To further

my insertion of Marlow's complex as a god, we can argue that in this closing quotation, Marlow is attributing himself as a god. He reminds us of his obsession over his own capacity as a human and what he is capable of – that his mind is capable of anything, the past, present, and future. Maybe Conrad also has a complex that he is incapable of conquering, but capable enough of observing and analysing, then admitting the introspection to himself, just like Marlow. And considering the time when Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness*, his writing and stance can be seen from a sense of immortality and authority.

Similar to how McEwan and Perowne were one, I consider Conrad and Marlow to be the same character. Marlow describes his observations as ugly – their [monster's] existence, activity, and culture – yet argues that “if you're man enough” you would see through it and find yourself equal. Marlow doesn't find himself equal, but he does speak with authority by implying that he is man enough to try to suppress his arrogance and believe that he is deeply rooted in humanity to have a remote sense of what culture and traditions mean. This circles us back to the theme of hypocrisy that was well explored during the first half of literature.

Marlow believes he is modest and more of a man than most people for thinking that he can analyze African culture and traditions and see through the monstrous ways. Which, perhaps during his time, he was. However, he doesn't really achieve this because he dismisses his own nation's oppressive objectives onto the African people. To reiterate, Marlow is conscious enough to consider them as shackled monsters. But he doesn't acknowledge the crimes that were committed to keep the people shackled. He naively, ignorantly, and arrogantly believes he is somehow more righteous than the average man, by being “man enough” to see through this discriminatory bias and acknowledge that both himself and the shackled monsters have a common ancestry. Sadly, without acknowledging the crimes and oppressive culture from which he benefits from, Marlow is not any more of a man than the average man. In fact, he is instead hypocritical for believing otherwise – sheltering idly, observing the scene.

I found this comparison to be rather humorous because it felt like Marlow was trying to tell another human – “you’re not human!” – for not looking, acting, or behaving in the human ways that he is accustomed to. When in fact, that very same human could say the same thing about Marlow. In the same way, chicken paste can be compared to chicken nuggets. Many of us attribute unfavorable people as chicken paste and favorable people as chicken nuggets. Everyone seems to love chicken nuggets because it is the typical, it is commonly accepted as the perfect end result. However, many of us seem to forget that there is a process of becoming perfect. A side that is taboo to attribute oneself to. Even though the dish is comprised of the same ingredients. In this way, hypocrisy prevails because though the dish comprises of the same ingredients, the chicken paste is more real – it is pure chicken, raw, and everything except the oil that turns it to chicken nuggets.



When reflecting on the approach that I took on this analysis, I found myself criticising the writing style of the author more than the actual text. The last time this happened was when I was writing the two analyses on Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*. I made it a point that I did not enjoy the book because of McEwan’s writing style. He was incredibly talented and skilful with his literary ability in English, however his exactness, precision, and desire to be overly-professional with writing took precedent over the book’s story and distracted me from the text. One could say that McEwan has an obsessive need to be exact; he could craft ten lines for one sentence and it would still be proper – how painful, yet talented.

I felt the same way with *Heart of Darkness* in the concept that Joseph Conrad was similarly skilful with his literary ability. Compared to McEwan, rather than the acute precision in



the English language, it was more of an acute obsession to relay his wisdom or advanced knowledge in regards to philosophy and metaphors. By doing so, Conrad crafted sentences and phrases that were similarly structured by McEwan. They were crafted with intent. I constantly got the feeling that Conrad was writing Charlie Marlow as if he were an alter-ego of himself. There is nothing wrong with writing a book where the protagonist is heavily influenced by the author's self-image. However, just like *Saturday*, Conrad's writing was rather distracting to the story itself. When reflecting on the writing style of *Heart of Darkness*, I couldn't help but form a bias perspective. So much so that I was compelled to form my analysis around that particular criticism. But perhaps that is the writing style of these famous authors and their heavy, literary education and expertise. After the taste of raw chicken paste, then stale chicken nuggets, I required a refreshing take to revitalize drama in literature was never more needed – so I turned to *The Poisonwood Bible*.

Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* follows the Price family as they move their life from Georgia, United States, to the Belgian-ruled Kilanga, Congo. Kingsolver writes the novel in a unique sequencing form that we usually do not see in contemporary writing. She channels a "surprisingly old novelistic technique" that was "pioneered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century" and tells the story in a "sequence of monologues by different characters" (Keefer 2). The passages are particularly interesting to read due to the style of monologues presented with Kingsolver's sequencing form. The chapters are short which keeps readers ever engaged in a continuous progression of holistic story telling.

Aside from Nathan Price, the patriarch of the Prices and evangelist, each Price family member take turns telling their story as their lives progress from leaving Georgia to settling in Kilanga. Kingsolver takes into consideration the maturity level of all Price family members. Each member being varied in age, Kingsolver executed the consciousness of each member perfectly

through monologues. A particular passage that I wanted to focus on can be found in one of Ruth May Price's monologues from page 20 to 21.

Ruth May Price is the youngest member of the Price family. Being only five years old when the family decides to move to Kilanga, Kingsolver does an excellent job at preserving Ruth May's innocence as a child and successfully uses Ruth May's voice as a medium to neutralize the overwhelming change in life. Ruth May doesn't yet seem to be alarmed by the uprooting of the family, and seems to move along with the direction of the change. Her story telling is more of an account of what is happening at the moment of her monologue whereas her mother's, Orleanna, seems to recollect past accounts. The little details that Ruth May decides to focus on during her story telling is also innocently unique and light compared to other characters so far.

On page 21, Ruth May says that "they [the Underdown boys] felt sorry for us so they sent us comic books to take on the airplane with us. I got almost all of them to myself when Leah and them all went to sleep on the airplane. *Donald Duck*. *Lone Ranger*. And the fairy-tale ones, *Cinderella* and *Briar Rose*. I hid them in a place. Then I got to feeling bad and upchucked on the airplane, and it got all over a duffel bag and the *Donald Duck*. I put that one under the cushion so we don't have it anymore. So this is who all will be in our village: the Price family, Lone Ranger, Cinderella, Briar Rose, and the Tribes of Ham" when talking about her trip to Kilanaga and recollecting what other "white people" will be in that part of Africa.

I see Ruth May's innocence of people and her lightness in the gravity of the situation like a potluck event. Though there is nothing wrong with a potluck event, for imagination and argument sake, I imagine something like a Thanksgiving potluck tradition, with an assortment and variety of American styled dishes, celebrating for something that should, instead, be focused on the Native American's history. It's like Ruth May can observe the Thanksgiving potluck and see that it is mostly an American influenced event – which for her, is alright now, but

she cannot grasp the gravity of the situation or what might be in the bigger picture. But nonetheless, Ruth May's character is a child and her naivety successfully preserves her innocence; it is easy for us to forgive her naivety.



Perhaps it is better that Ruth May is so innocently portrayed because she seems to be the family member that is able to preserve the American influence the best. Her innocence allows for a channel where other family members can reminisce in the memories of American life before moving to Kilanga, Congo. Kingsolver's portrayal of Ruth May, never growing out of her innocence, is strategically done to add space and lightness in the drama and scenery when other characters bring a sense of heaviness.

I appreciate that Kingsolver considers Ruth May's age and maturity level when writing her voice. The passage is voiced as if Ruth May were thinking like a five-year-old, preserving her innocence, which could become a significant, steadfast rock for the Price family. As each member progresses in their story while living in Kilanga, they may end up relying on Ruth May's innocence to reminisce in their past life, or maybe use it as a driver to find a way toward their own salvation – their way out of Kilanga.

The simplicity in Ruth May's thoughts, the sense of no particular stress, and easy to follow comprehension of the character is a refreshing aspect of the book that I appreciate. If Ruth May were an ingredient in a Thanksgiving potluck meal, she would likely be the gravy. Like gravy, Ruth May doesn't seem to have any particular focus. And like gravy, she makes everything better. Gravy works as a medium to combine flavors together. Turkey and collard greens alone – yuck! – but add gravy – delicious! Like Ruth May, gravy brings joy, life, a savory taste, to a dish. It is the familiar innocence that every character needs and it is the reminder of naivety during the toughest times. The Price family certainly needed gravy to help them endure an already harsh transition. Being able to watch Ruth May interact, play, and teach her new friends must've brought a taste of home for the Price family. Just like gravy for a Thanksgiving meal.

Not yet Thanksgiving, but close to the holiday and similar meal experience, I was back in Boston, Massachusetts visiting my family during a recent weekend. During this time, I was reminded of *The Poisonwood Bible*. When meditating on Ruth May's character, I wondered who, in the Price family, would be the opposite ingredient to Ruth May. We were celebrating my father's birthday at Filho's in Groton, Massachusetts. I ordered Veal Gnocchi Bolognese from their special menu of the day and we ordered a variety of Italian-inspired dishes. Cucumber and Asparagus salad, Tomato and Kale mix, Chicken Potato Salad, Garlic Bread, Frutti Di Mare, and a Pizzetta Di Giorno. A Thanksgiving potluck in a way... but more of an Italian potluck. What should have been a perfect, savory blend of flavors and colors quickly shattered away when I had a bite of veal. This moment reminded me of a particular character in *The Poisonwood Bible*.



On page 96, back in Georgia, Orleana Price recounts a time while the Price family were in Kilanga, Africa. While in a dispute with the village chief, Tata Ndu, Orleana remembers observing Nathan's behavior and a unique characteristic of the patriarch. "Nathan, meanwhile, wrapped himself up in the salvation of Kilanga. Nathan as a boy played football on his high school team in Killdeer, Mississippi, with great success evidently, and expected his winning season to continue ever after. He could not abide losing or backing down. I think he was well inclined toward stubbornness, and contemptuous of failure, long before his conscription into the war and the strange circumstances that discharged him from it. After that, hounded by what happened in a Philippine jungle and the ghosts of a thousand men who didn't escape it, his steadfast disdain for cowardice turned to obsession. It's hard to imagine a mortal man more unwilling to change his course than Nathan Price. He couldn't begin to comprehend, now, how far off the track he was with his baptismal fixation."

Orleana remembers observing her husband, the evangelic missionary, having a sort of obsession and a stubbornness. Nathan has tasted what success is from early on and it followed him throughout his careers going through life. But this has made him obsessive towards a particular path of righteousness and obsession. And as a result, Orleana cannot think of another man who is more stubborn and obsessive than Nathan. In this particular passage, Nathan can be imagined as an ingredient and flavor in a dish that you do not enjoy. The dish is

great and flavors are blended to taste fantastic, but there is something particular about that one ingredient, that one flavor, that makes your taste buds stand up in confusion. Do you like this taste? Do you not? It is just plain awkward.

The moment I took a bite of veal from the Veal Gnocchi Bolognese at Filho's was the moment I thought about Nathan. I found it to be humorous that this passage came up, but I felt that it would be interesting and funny to compare Nathan Price as an ingredient in a dish. Nathan Price is like the veal. Typically, in many culinary dishes, veal is a rather outstanding type of meat compared to normal land meats like chicken, beef, or pork. In a similar way, Nathan is also a rather outstanding type of man. Outstanding might be stretching the line, but it is undeniable that Nathan was elevated by his success early in life. Throughout Orleana and the Price's recounts of Nathan, Nathan can be observed having a particular feeling, almost an entitlement, of being superior and dominant; of being superior over all others and being the main ingredient that brings a dish together. Or so he thinks he is.

I did not like the veal in the Veal Gnocchi Bolognese because the ingredient's flavor tasted overwhelming. What should have been blended with the sauce and smaller bits of red meat, the veal was prepared in big chunks and not marinated before being added into the bolognese sauce. In comparison, Nathan is the veal because he *thinks* that his previous successes also mean success in his particular dispute with the village chief; the veal *thinks* that because of its previous successes in other dishes, it is also the success of this particular dish.



The images above are the same picture of the Veal Gnocchi Bolognese. The only difference is that the right side has two types of circles drawn on the image. The circles represent the meats, or typically the main or alpha of a dish, of the dish. The green circle is the veal and the yellow circle is the red meat. Nathan Price's stubbornness to demonstrate his unique flavor is like the obsessive size and annoying in flavor of the veal. In comparison to other main ingredients like the red meat, the veal is just overwhelming in size and almost feels like it is attempting to be the superior or dominant ingredient of the dish.

Similarly, Nathan Price is so stubborn to ensure that his flavor is felt and tasted by the other ingredients – other people in the village and church – that he ends up overwhelming the dish and redundantly annoying. Instead of bringing the dish together and making it something spectacular, rising to success, the veal actually lowered the quality of the dish while managing to make the overall blended taste awkward... and quite frankly annoying to eat. Rather, it would have been better if the veal was taken into consideration from the start of the dish, and properly sized and blended, marinated with the rest of the sauce – just like all the red meats – before attempting to earn any sort of acknowledgement for being part of the dish. Had Nathan had an approach of neutrality and adaptability instead of dominance and superiority, he may have reached success in his attempt to win over the village, the chief, and the people for his church.

Simply, my conclusion is that characters like Nathan Price are unappetizing because of their attitudes. Characters like Nathan, who are unable to be a team player, often leave a sour taste in my mouth – sometimes, quite literally! A delicious dish requires that all the ingredients are equally fresh, equally modest, and equally important, blending them in neutrality and making them all team players. A dish can be ruined when one single ingredient is not fresh, or arrogant, or sanctified. Characters like this, who are unable to adapt, blend, and approach with some level of neutrality, are frequently unappetizing. But that's not to say there is no redemption. A

successful dish comes a long way with trial and error. I could compare a successful dish – the Frutti Di Mare – to the unsuccessful Veal Gnocchi Bolognese.



In Italian, Frutti Di Mare means fruit of the sea. Typically, the dish can include an assortment of seafood, making it a popular multi-seafood dish. A successful Frutti Di Mare blends many seafood flavors together into a wonderfully wholesome taste – all the while preserving the succulent, savory unique flavors of each seafood. The distinct flavors come together in harmony so much so that, perhaps, the dish should be renamed to harmony of the sea! It is not dominated by one particular flavor that tries hard to be distinct. And as a stark comparison, the contrast between the Frutti Di Mare at Filho's and the Veal Gnocchi Bolognese was surprising. It felt like Nathan Price was not present in the Frutti Di Mare; as if the veal wasn't in the Veal Gnocchi Bolognese.

You can also notice the circles in the picture on the right. In this particular dish from Filho's, we had clams, mussels, scallops, and shrimp. You can notice how the main ingredients, the variety of seafood meats, are all essentially the same size. Just by comparing size alone, this dish was prepared with more consideration with the ratios of the main ingredients. It succeeded because it preserves the unique flavors of each ingredient while appropriately asserting their place, or influence, in the dish. This is the difference between what could have



been a successful evangelical leader compared to Nathan Price, in this particular passage of Orleanna's recount of her husband.

Barbara Kingsolver's dramatic structure and structure in events is so intriguing and well organized, that I found myself being pulled into the story while doing my chores and listening to the audiobook version of *The Poisonwood Bible*. It is interesting to note the difference of Barbara Kingsolver's story telling narration compared to other creative writers like Nawal El Saadawi or Atiq Rahimi. Authors like Atiq Rahimi, who have experience in films, are extremely visually creative. Particularly, Rahimi's dramatic structure was impressive to me. His dramatic structure relied on his specialty and experience from films and was channelled into successfully crafting and narrating scenes before dialogues are ever introduced. Because of how artistically the scenes are approached, and how visually encouraging Rahimi's writing is, readers are often pulled into a dramatic mood to feel emotions deeper when the dialogues are finally introduced.

In comparison to Atiq Rahimi, Nawal El Saadawi's dramatic structure was heavily reliant on her details in writing. The long sentence structures, written in prose. And the stresses in particular words, the mixture of natural and artificial scenes while preserving rich imagery was wildly amazing to read through. El Saadawi could bring forms of fun and joy, moments of happiness and transcends light in darkness with her innovative, detailed dramatic writing style. Interestingly, I would compare Barbara Kingsolver and also describe her as innovative, detailed in her writing, and quite dramatic as well.

Barbara Kingsolver not only revives, but reinvents the traditional story telling technique from classic books. The practice of writing books in monologues and progressing characters is not new, however Kingsolver's details in her writing and her ability to weave and connect multiple stories and vantage points are impressive. Kingsolver also demonstrates an effort in always trying to keep the book exciting for readers by committing to the personalities of each narrator in *The Poisonwood Bible*. Readers can certainly observe, especially if reading when

paired and listening with the audiobook, that each Price child has a unique tone of voice. The tones distinctly portray each character while also adding another layer of uniqueness to each character. And each Price child, along with their mother, Orleana, blend together to become a wonderfully wholesome family in a broken time in life. It is very interesting to observe and compare how the writing styles of each of these visually creative authors can introduce particular feelings, flavors and tastes to the stories they craft. It makes me wonder whether *The Poisonwood Bible* could be an interesting story if written in the form of a play like Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*. Another author that naturally invokes particular feelings, flavors, and tastes that are so intense and visually creative is Paul Auster.

Paul Auster has a natural talent in writing mystery novels. His outstanding ability to blur the lines of fiction and reality, while clearly engaging in fiction, and simultaneously providing a real environment for readers to tread in was monumental to my comprehension and reading experience. I have never felt so engage in a book like I was with *The New York Trilogy: City of Glass*. A mystery novel written around a fictional character named Quinn, who initially pretends to be a Paul Auster – a detective – is intentionally annoying, exhilarating, debilitating, thrilling, and humorous. These are all ingredients that make a deliciously suspenseful dish.

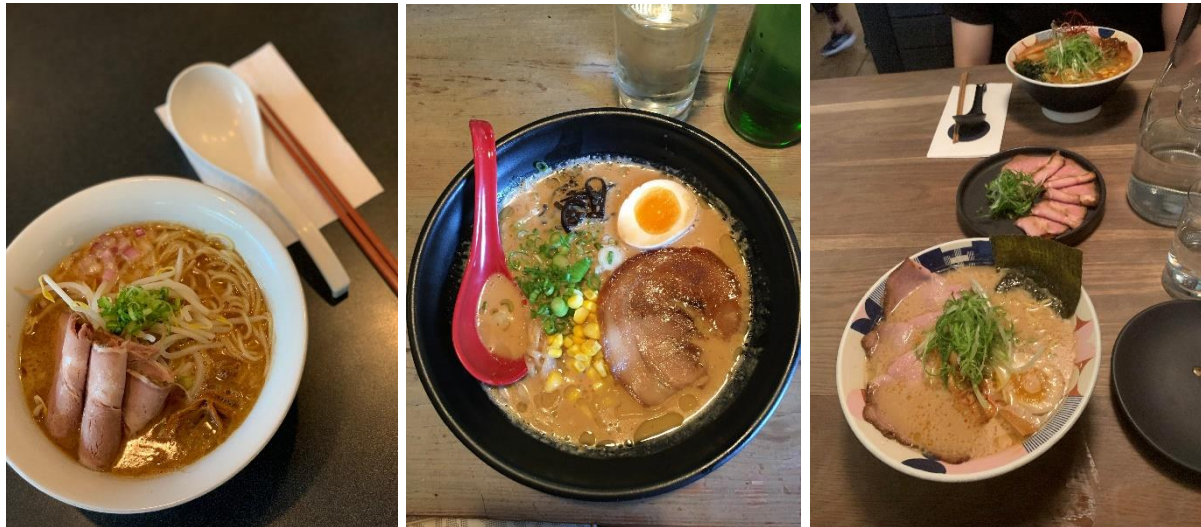
A mystery is like ramen. Reading a good mystery book is like eating ramen – the suspense, thrill, and taste are all familiar, you know what typically unfolds, you recognize the usual ingredients, but you just quite can't put your finger on the mystery until you finish the bowl. Paul Auster, author of *City of Glass* and later the *New York Trilogy*, also agrees. On page 8 of *City of Glass*, Auster writes as he narrates for protagonist Quinn – “what he liked about these books was their sense of plenitude and economy. In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has potential to be so-which amounts to the same thing. The world of the book comes to life, seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions. Since everything seen or said, even the slightest,

most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center, then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.”

Auster writes that a good mystery does not waste resources. Similar to a good mystery, a good ramen does not waste ingredients. All of the ingredients contribute to the distinct flavors of “ramen”, noticeable regardless of the quality – whether it is cheap Top Ramen or whether it is craft artisan ramen. The experience of tasting these particular flavors is like reading and tasting a good mystery. All the elements are there – they are all so familiar but each ramen dish and each mystery is different. It is designed to keep you on the edge of your seat as you wonder which detail will manifest to become the crucial pivoting point in the mystery. Comparably, eating a bowl of ramen keeps you on the edge of your seat as you ravage through the dish, wondering which particular ingredient is the highlight of the dish. As you eat different ingredients of different portions, you are helplessly left wondering what the perfect combination is. Perhaps there is no perfect combination at all and maybe “the question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell” (Auster, 3).

Just like how Paul Auster teases us with the mysterious story in *City of Glass*, the chefs behind ramen dishes enjoy teasing us as well. Crafting the perfect ramen dish is no ordinary task. In other genres of writing, there are usually characters who are appetizing and characters who are not. But when we enter the genre of mystery, regardless of a good or bad mystery, every character is appetizing. In a book like *City of Glass*, readers are unable to disregard details that might be considered mundane because every detail matters when preparing the story for the end. And “whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell”, but rather for the reader to digest. Each story can be different for each reader and as a result, the author and chef’s focus are shifted solely to crafting the story and dish. Whether there is a greater

meaning behind the story or dish doesn't matter. What matters is that the reader and customer are on the edge of the seat, eating, enjoying, and continuously curious until the end. I believe that Paul Auster did a fantastic job doing just this.



Similar to eating a bowl of ramen, reading through the second chapter of *City of Glass* invoked a feeling of appetite. The chapter is solely reserved for the voice of Peter Stillman and the apparent 14-hour long conversation he has with Quinn – or monologue, since Quinn never responded until Peter Stillman was finally done. While it was dreadful reading through Peter Stillman's broken English and stutters, there was a beauty in it. And as hard as it was reading through Peter Stillman's monologue, it reminded me that every detail is meaningful, just like ingredients in a ramen dish. What makes it matter is the entirety of the story, of the dish, that allows for those previous details to hold meaning. It made me wonder if anything in particular during this monologue was more important and at the same time it made me feel like everything was equally unimportant. There was a beauty in this – I felt as though I could simply be curious, move on, and enjoy the story; it took pressure away from analysing the story before it ever got to finish. I can certainly compare this to eating a delicious bowl of artisan ramen.

I often find myself excited, thrilled, anxious, then satisfied when eating a good bowl of ramen. There are ingredients that I don't recognize, that I've never eaten, but, like a mystery story, that is unimportant to my overall satisfaction. All that matters is whether I enjoyed the experience at the bottom of the bowl. A bowl of ramen can be very unique. Often times, artisan ramen are made with just a handful of ingredients. The purpose of this is as to instill a balance in the dish as you consume it. At first, the broth seems overwhelming because it appears to be too much. But as you begin to drink the broth, it soothes your soul and you crave for more. You can always rely on the broth to neutralize all the flavors previously consumed. Quinn is like the broth. The story is not particularly about Quinn, but rather a story that involves Quinn. And Quinn serves as an intermediary between narration, voices, and sub-stories of other characters. These other characters can then be attributed as other main ingredients in a ramen dish – the noodles, the meat, and the primary vegetable. Each serves a role and has their own distinct flavor to add to the broth. In this way, readers can observe that every character Quinn encounters in *City of Glass* eventually contributes and influences his own self. In this way, the balance is instilled. It progressively builds up to become the balance that was intended.

This property is unique to ramen because when compared to other noodle dishes, the outcome, feeling, and experience are all different. In relation to the world, ramen can be compared to other foods. But that would quickly result in a comparison like sci-fi vs. natural history. More relatedly, in relation to other stories, ramen can be compared to other noodle soups. What is the difference?

Ramen often seems like a cloudy mix of an array of ingredients that somehow blend together. It doesn't seem like it would, but that is as equally important as unimportant, just like the details of a mystery story. The ramen mixture doesn't seem right but it seems *just* right at the same time. It is only at the end of the dish that you can finally decide what may have driven the dish – and each person who has consumed this dish will have their own opinion. This feeling

is unique to ramen dishes because it is distinct compared to other noodle dishes. Typically, other noodle dishes have a single main ingredient that dominates the dish. Whether it is the meat, the vegetables, or the noodles themselves, there is usually a single ingredient that drives other noodle dishes. Whereas a ramen dish is often crafted to be unilateral with flavors and dominance. There is often a single slice of quality meat, like braised pork, that is nowhere near enough to dominate the dish, but the flavor and texture are so rich that it complements the dish just right.

I wanted to compare *City of Glass* with *The Fire This Time* by Jesmyn Ward. During the first half of the semester, we were typically reading books that had a centralized theme of oppression. A unique perspective from Ward's writing was how she was able to compile a variety of contemporary authors, their works, and opinions into a large collection that spoke together. Each story was as important as it was unimportant to the overall story. And "the question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell" (Auster, 3). Whether intentional or not, I observed that Ward had similarly compiled works in the same regard. *The Fire This Time* was written in a way to encourage modern readers to think, reflect, and evaluate what they know. It challenged readers to compile their own opinions rather than allowing the story to tell them what to think or feel. In the same way, Paul Auster wrote *City of Glass* in a way to invoke readers to enjoy the ride and focus on the journey to the end before coming to any judgments; a perfect book and perfect way to end this semester's journey. Because maybe nothing matters. Maybe everything matters. And perhaps everything we encounter is as unimportant as it is important.

If there is one thing that I have learned throughout my journey through global literature, it is exactly that. In a life that is overflowed with endless global literature, there is a range of literature that is offered to everyone. From objective writing – with missions, statements, declarations, and memoirs – to musical writing – with sounds, and melody, harmony, tone, and

disruption – to artistic writing – with senses, emotions, and drama – there is only inspiration, perspective, and enrichment to wisdom and life that is waiting for readers. No matter how much I struggled to read books I disliked and regardless of how bias I considered the work of an author, I can only commend each and every author from the books I have had the opportunity to read this semester. I respect each novel because of how much work was accomplished to publish the work. Even if I did not agree with the objective of a book or the perspective of an author, there is something that can be learned from observing how much effort was put into accomplishing the work of art. This inspired the child in me as well as the adult in me; always experiment and always observe; there as much to learn as there is nothing to learn. But always experiment and always observe. Keep reading and expanding your senses.

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