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### A Global, Chronological Expedition: Major 20<sup>th</sup> Century Writers

It has been an amazing journey through the 20<sup>th</sup>-century writings. The writers have brought out their experiences and perspectives regarding the social, economic and political aspects of life passionately and intriguingly by integrating appropriate literary devices in their writings. What is fascinating about these writings is that most of the events recorded in their works are either their own experiences or observations put in a written form hence appealing to readers' thoughts and emotions. For instance, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the world and me* is an epistolary novel in which Coates addresses his fifteen-year-old son, Samori, explaining to him his experiences living in America in a black body. Coates explains to him his intellectual, personal and historical development. He also explains to his son about his upbringing in the ghettos of Baltimore where he learned the codes of living in the streets for his survival. He explains how his upbringing was different from his son's; How his father was hard on him.

Coates gives his personal account of events and perils that he had to deal with as he was growing up. Being a young black boy, one needed to be as twice as good and be able to take responsibility for other black boys' actions and knowing and following all the rules of struggling more than other people. He knows that his experience of growing up in a black body in America is different from his son's but one thing that remains clear is that being black is fraught with perils and one must struggle more than the white counterparts. This truth pains him as he cannot make it okay to him. He concludes his letter by asserting that the struggle may be hard as it seems, but it provides meaning to everyone's life. Coates recounts an interview he gave in a popular news where he was asked to explain why he believed that America was founded on

looting and violence. This question appears to upset him since he believes that it is clear America was founded on slavery and genocide and is still fueled by racism. At the time Coates was writing this book, there were many injustices that the blacks were undergoing in the United States. These facts prevent Coates from offering his son platitudes but instead informs his son that he will have to learn how to bear the weight of these disadvantages just as others including Coates himself did.

While reading this book, a reader would wonder the circumstances or life experiences which forced Coates to write to his son concerning such issues. Well, Coates found himself a father at the age of 24. He named his son Samori, after a west African leader who resisted French rule called Samori Touré. Coates dropped out of Howard and moved to Prince George's County in Maryland, a notoriously dangerous place where police officers used excessive force. The PG County police officers were unstoppable and could kill blacks at any time. Coates had read an article in *The Washington Post* about a police shooting. The victim was Coates friend called Prince Jones who was killed for allegedly intended to run over a police officer, yet Jones had not done any such thing. He began researching about police brutality in PG County, and the findings made him angrier and angrier. He moved his family to New York City and established himself as a writer mainly focusing on the plight of African Americans.

*Between the World and Me* contains various literary skills. Contemporary writers can learn a great number of these literary devices and use them in their own writings. Metaphors have been used in different instances throughout the book. For examples, when explaining how the whites turn a blind eye to reality, Coates uses a metaphoric awakening, "When the journalist asked me about my body, it was like she was asking me to awaken her from a gorgeous dream." He also uses similes, for instance, he compares America to a blanket he wishes to fold over his

head as he escapes into his dream, “And for so long I have wanted to escape into the Dream, to fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies.” (p.11). He also uses conjure visual imagery to reference the American dream. He sees it as an exterior of perfection and aspiration, “It is a perfect house with nice lawns.” Apart from understanding the plight of African Americans during the time this book was written, the reader also learns a variety of literary devices that significantly improve his or her literary skills.

Another writer who has given a passionate perspective on racial discrimination and the disadvantages that African Americans faced is James Baldwin. With his classic collection of essays published in 1963, *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin has successfully and passionately addressed this issue of racial discrimination. *The Fire Next Time (1963)* opens with an intimate letter Baldwin wrote to his nephew. Influenced by Baldwin's writings, Ta-Nehisi Coates also utilizes the epistolary form and writes an intimate letter to his son in “*Between the World and Me*” Published in 2015. *Between the World and Me* implements structural and thematic elements from Baldwin's work and draws influence from “*The Fire Next Time*” as seen through its formatting and account of racial issues, although through a more modern-day application. Both essays are respective letters to young men tackling what it meant to live in a black body in American and consequently offers solutions from the perspective of their writers on the best way to tackle these problems. Both authors appeal to the audience's emotions (pathos) and are valued social critics (ethos) in the black community, but through their individual, affective tone, they present differing messages and writing structure for racial conciliation, the issues of both past and modern-day bare striking similarities in the fight for equality.

*My Dungeon Shook* is the first letter in *The Fire Next Time* in which he addresses his nephew and namesake, James. Baldwin and Coates speak about the proverbial white wall of America impermeable for young black men. Baldwin acknowledges the struggles of being a black man in white America. His tone is one of hope and relays a plea for his nephew to retain this hope. The tone is often empathetic, serious and loving towards his audience, regarding mending the racial inequality. This is evident when he writes "*You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature,*" relays empathy as well as provides a symbolic reference to the order of nature and its relation to Christianity in terms of the laws of nature, relevant to the laws of Christianity (p.8). Baldwin, however, thinks that the whites are blissfully ignorant and innocent. He tells his nephew, "for these innocent people have no other hope" (p.8). However, the main difference between Coates and Baldwin's writings is that Coates often used angrier tone while Baldwin used languid, preacher-like sentences. Coates sentences, therefore, call the reader to urgent action as opposed to Baldwin's tone of empathy, "you must accept them, accept them with love" because, despite white prejudice, one must exhibit compassion."

Baldwin believes that both the whites and Black people need each other for them to achieve a unified country and change the history of the world. He attempted to open a dialogue to improve the racial tension. He is optimistic that the blacks and whites can become equal therefore attain a society which is unified. In his letter to his nephew, James offers a solution that education and acceptance of white people's obtuse social attitude as opposed to developing toxic feelings of resentment. He believes that Americans for a long time has denied their own morality and lacked a sense of accountability. He holds that Americans may have a promising future of equality and freedom, his changed belief system, but the whites must open their eyes to

their innocence and blissful ignorant while the blacks must individually learn to accept their past so that racial reconciliation and integration can actualize.

Both Coates', *Between the world and me* and Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, are both epistolary novels which address the same issue of racial tensions in America and also addressed to young men living in the black body in the United States. However, there are significant differences in the two writings regarding the tone, sentence structures and the solution each writer provides. Both effectively used rhetorical devices in their writings especially repetition. There are also uses of imagery such as similes and metaphor. Coates drew influence from Baldwin, and this is evident in his accounts of racial issues. When Coates moved to New York, he started researching about racial injustices, and it is appropriate to assume that Baldwin's works formed his major sources. However, in Baldwin's latter *My Dungeon Shook*, he conveys a more realistic message of optimism to his nephew James and a plea to the future generation. On the other hand, Coates prepares his son, Samori, to learn to deal with all the disadvantages that he will undergo and does not show any sign of optimism of a better and unified nation. Coates also used short sentences and angrier tone compared to Baldwin's longer sentences full of empathy.

Baldwin's assertion that it is, in fact, the blacks that must accept the white brought about an essential and reversal understanding of the meaning of integration. It tried to resolve the nation's racial tension. In fact, it is the work of Baldwin that motivated later writers such as Coates. Coates on his side explored the issue of modern race relations. Baldwin uses a personal approach. He looks at the racial problem that affected the entire nation from his own viewpoint. The first essay act as Baldwin's plea to his bitter and outraged nephew. He urges his nephew to remain compassionate in the face of racism. Baldwin also uses Christian practices of both blacks

and whites in his book. For examples, he believed that Christianity limits whites and hence make them like the blacks. Baldwin sees the hatred for racism as the largest self-hatred and the exploitation of the blacks by the whites has made the whites so guilty. He recounted his teenage life as a Christian minister. He entered into Christian ministry because the church gave an apparent safety from the dangers of the street.

Moving away from these two epistolary books, *Between the World and Me* and *The Fire Next Time*, we ran into another collection of essays that provides a more modernistic view into the issues of racial discrimination, *The Fire This Time*. *The Fire This Time* includes seventeen essays which are divided into three sections; Legacy, Reckoning and Jubilee. The essays in the first section, Legacy, touched on the issues of ancestry and the past. They particularly talk about the literary journey towards a better understanding of the black literary legends including James Baldwin and Philip Wheatley. What comes out clearly in both the essays is that people somewhat misunderstood some aspects of the lives of the legendary writers. For example, Rachel Ghansah realized that despite Baldwin move to France in order to escape racism and later became a literary giant, he is not different from her grandfather. Wheatley too was potentially very different than favorite sources suggest, especially when it comes to her husband according to Honoree Jeffers.

The two essays; "White Range" and "Where Do We Go from Here?" makes a connection between the past and the present thereby showing how history has repeated itself. "White Rage" posits an idea that there has been a backlash for every major period of black advancement. "Cracking the Code" and "Lonely in America" on the other hand talks about a more personal connection with the past. Jesmin Ward in "Cracking the Code" seeks to know of her DNA in order to learn of her personal connection with the past. Wendy Walters feels deep loneliness in

"Lonely in America" and sought out graves of slaves in New England for her to find some connections to her past and face the horrors of slavery in the place she calls home.

In the Reckoning section, there is a wide range of issues that the essays address. For instance, "Blacker Than Thou," the author Kevin Young defines blackness and uses figures such as Rachel Dolezal to show what blackness is not. In "Black and Blue," the issue of walking while black is discussed. He compares and contrasts a black man walking in the streets of Kingston and the same black man walking in the street of New Orleans and New York. Other stories have also talked about the conditions of black people as that of mourning due to racial discrimination. Others call for empathy for black lives. In "Know Your Rights" police brutality against children are discussed. The last section is the Jubilee, where the writers seem to support and or call for a revolution. The essay expresses the idea that the writer is not happy about her partner's fear and support and desire for black joy. Daniel Rose calls for celebration and freedom for black people and her daughter too.

Jesmin Ward believes that talking about racial issues is still indispensable. She feels that people walk away from the conversation of racial discrimination only because people are too tired of talking about it. She thinks that people should not give up the fight for what is fair. I believe that *The Fire This Time* has successfully created a thoughtful conversation about the current state of race relations in the United States. No matter how regretful the whites might be, or how sympathetic they can be, they will never see things the way the black see them. Therefore, this essay is essential to let the whites and other races including myself to have a glimpse of how racial discrimination has affected the blacks and how the past has indeed colored their present and their future. In his opening letter, '*My Dungeon Shook*,' James Baldwin advises his nephew on how to live in the black body in America. He fosters the need for blacks to

understand whites. In short, he advocated for racial reconciliation. Baldwin knew that it is the blacks who are bitter about the treatment that they have received from the whites; therefore, he urges them not to be bitter but to approach their discomfort and anger with utmost sobriety. Both Baldwin and Ward advocates for racial reconciliation.

One of the main themes that come out in Ward's anthology is acknowledging the reality of the pervasiveness of racial inequality. The current generation appears to be familiar with the words of Isabel Wilkerson, "the loss of black life at the hands of authorities does not so much merit further inquiry and that the caste system has only mutated with the time" (Ward 715). Wilkerson states that even though the fight for racial equality appears to have ended when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted, the lingering elements continue and that the activists should not relent in the fight for equality. She believes that the journey is far from being over and that when the current generation reviews and understand the history, they will be reenergized in their fight for racial equality. The Black Lives Matter "movement can be read as an attempt to keep mourning an open dynamic in our culture because black lives exist in a state of precariousness" (Ward 1627). *The Fire This Time* offers more contemporary views about racial discrimination and the state of African Americans. In this anthology, the prevailing theme is that the fight for racial equality is far from over and the current generation must continue with this fight to address the still lingering elements of racial tension.

What exactly is 'The American Dream'? Coates, Baldwin, and Ward continuously referred to the American Dream in their works as they discussed the plight of black people in America and hoped for a more unified nation. This is the question that nagged my mind every time as I was reading the novel, *The Great Gatsby* by Scott Fitzgerald. Scott Fitzgerald has explained the concept of the American dream from a completely different angle from most of the

writers of his era. Basically, the American Dream is an idea that anyone regardless of their race or social status can be successful in America just if they work hard enough. It presented a pretty rosy view of American society. The 1920s saw the years of increased migration in the United States coupled with similarly increased xenophobia. This is the same period that the country was in the midst of an economic boom and every hard-working American could make a fortune investing in stock and bond trade among other businesses. It appears that this amazing wealth and economic potential displayed in the early twenties was just as ephemerals as Gatsby parties.

Nick Carraway, a young man from Minnesota, opens the books by stating that he learned from his father to reserve judgment about others. He believes that he is a high moral and tolerant person. In 1922, he just arrived in New York where he had moved to work in the bond business. He rented a house in a part of Long Island called West Egg which was the homes to the "new rich." The New Rich were those who had recently made their fortunes. The New Rich lavishly displayed their wealth in West Egg. Nick meets his hero, Gatsby, a wealthy neighbor who owns a bungalow and quickly believed in The American Dream. Nick later learned that most of Gatsby's wealth came from illegal activities. There is a mention of World War 1 in chapter one which depicts that the years of the 1920s was tense to the American people and a period of hollow decadence. However, this period was succeeded by more economically promising years. Gatsby could be the best representation of the American Dream in this novel, he comes from a humble background, a son of a poor farmer from North Dakota and rose to be notoriously wealthy. However, since it turned out that Gatsby did not honestly acquire his wealth and all he had later vanished including his own life, the book represents the impossibility of attaining America dreams.

The narrator soon introduces George and Myrtle who are both working hard to improve their economic conditions. These two couples represent American dreamers. George seeks to increase his wealth through his work while Myrtle has an affair with the wealthy Tom Buchanan to improve her lot in life. George owns a shop, and he is doing everything possible to get business, but he is from time to time being worn down due to the harsh demands of his life. Gatsby's intention of winning back his former girlfriend whom he left when he went to world war I is also revealed. He views Daisy as the ultimate symbol of status despite everything that he owns. However, everything came crashing down for Gatsby when Daisy refused to leave Tom Buchanan, and Myrtle is killed. George breaks down and kills Gatsby then shot himself. At this point, sadly all the dreamers; the new rich are dead, and others are hopeless, but the old money crowd is safe. Therefore, things do not turn out well for the young dreamers and Nick recounts his disappointment with the promise of the American dream. George, Myrtle, and Gatsby as portrayed by the narrator came from a humble background and chased their American dream.

On the other hand, there are characters in the novel who came from a wealthy background such as Tom Buchanan and Daisy. They are portrayed as the antagonists to the American Dream. Tom and Daisy don't necessarily need the American dream because they have old money. They were born with America already in their feet. Daisy turns down Gatsby, therefore, ending his American dream. She also drags the Wilsons into trouble. The way the two choose to live their lives and their poor morality is unethical to the American dream. The way they live their lives is as a direct result of the income inequality and their better start of life. This antagonizes the idea of the American dream since the American dream claims that everybody can rise to the top regardless of their background. From a different perspective, Daisy personifies the American dream. Daisy's voice in the story is directly tied to money and materialism. 'Her

voice is full of money,' he said suddenly. That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl,' (Fitzgerald, 129). The American dream is explicitly linked to money and therefore Daisy stand-in for the American Dream in the novel. But Daisy is only human and therefore flawed, she ultimately cannot embody the Gatsby's fantasy onto her, she turns him down. In other words, the American dream is just but a fantasy, a concept that did not hold weight especially during the years of the 1920s.

In *Between the World and Me*, Coates recounts his life as he was growing up. He grew up in Baltimore in the 1980s at the times when one could easily get killed just by walking on road to school. The first part of his letter is of profound importance as he addresses his fifteen-year-old son. He recounts the death of an African-American man which was never brought to justice. Drawing from his own personal, historical and intellectual development, Coates advised his son on how to live in a black body in America. He talks about his upbringing in the ghetto of Baltimore, contrasting this with the Great *Gatsby*, even though the characters in Fitzgerald's story have dreams of a better life, they live in a wealthy neighborhood, West Egg, inhabited by the new rich. However, just as in Coates', most of Fitzgerald's characters such as Gatsby himself, George and Myrtle come from a humble background. Coates speaks directly to his son about the perils of being a black boy. However, in *the Great Gatsby*, there is no focus on racism, only on the dreams of being successful. However, both communicate the idea of dreams. Coates believe in the black struggle as it will one-day bear fruits. In *Great Gatsby*, the characters are dreamers; however, their dream dies when most of them fall in tragedy and many lives end. In contrast, Fitzgerald depicts the impossibility of achieving the American dream.

Just like Coates and unlike Fitzgerald, James Baldwin addresses the issues of racial inequality in his book, *The Fire Next Time*. The focus of this comparison is on the first letter, "My Dungeon Shook." It is a letter Baldwin wrote to his Nephew on the One-Hundredth Anniversary of the emancipation. According to Baldwin, there was a need for his nephew to seek a lasting change to solve the plight of the black people in America rather than vengeance for the wrongs that they had been exposed to. According to him, the bitterness of the black American is absolutely justified but eliminating the whites people cannot bring forth any feasible solution. He addresses the fact that he and his nephew were both disadvantaged just because they were blacks. He acknowledges that they found themselves in an environment that they were expected to fail since the white people dictated everything.

On the other hand, Fitzgerald depicts a situation where the characters are from mixed backgrounds. Some from humble and others from wealthy backgrounds. The ones from humble background already figured out their lives and their goals. They are working through every means to attain their American dream. They are optimistic about a better future even though at times some are worn down due to their harsh life needs. Fitzgerald's novel made me understand the struggle to attain the American dream. It gives an insight into what the characters had to go through in their pursuit of happiness and achievements. The story indicates that in whatever course that a person begins, there often stumbling blocks that can bring great tragedy and hence the person's downfall. Most characters in *The Great Gatsby* tried all they could to make their dreams come true, unfortunately, in the end, the idea of the American dream just became an illusion that could never come true.

The contemporary writers have analyzed the concept of The American dream and compared to the modern global dreams. Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* offers a perfect way of

this comparison. The novel exposes the material wealth of these Asian. The setting of the film changes from Singapore to New York to Hong Kong. The characters move from one property to another across many countries in Asian. The settings itself shifts from elegant residence to fancy dinner clubs. This shift in the setting helps the audience to see different homes and lifestyles of the characters in the modern setting.

One of the key themes in *Crazy Rich Asians* is the place and portrayal of family among the characters. For example, with all the wealth that they had, how should their family look like? And what are the responsibilities of a family? In Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, the issue of the family did not come out much stronger. Though towards the end when Gatsby dies, his father came for the funeral after being notified of what had transpired by Nick Carraway. It is worth noting that Gatsby had left his family in the East to look for greener pasture and had little contact with his family. Nick plus other characters too abandoned their families to come and settle in West Egg. Therefore, it is right to say that in pursuit of the American dream, one had to give up many things including the family. Whereas, in the Global dream, the family still matters a lot even though people are often confused on how family members should interact and also on the responsibilities of family members towards one another.

The issue of identity also comes into play in *Crazy Rich Asians*. Rachel Hu comes from a working-class background having been raised by a single mother. She grew up under the wings of her mother and studied to become an economics professor. She has a strong mind of her own self and is not influenced by how wealthy or poor her boyfriend is. She had a chance to marry Nick, but she eventually turned him down due to differences in their social background which was the bone of contention. Rachel has portrayed that true riches lies in knowing where we came from and even though she had a challenging background, she refuses to be lured into the

prospect of marrying riches. Contrasting this with the pursuit for the American dream, many characters in *Great Gatsby* lost themselves while chasing their dreams. Gatsby amassed his wealth through illegal activities. Myrtle Wilson had an affair with Tom Buchanan despite being a married woman just to get wealth and be on a wealthy social class. When Gatsby died, his friends all ran away. This shows that they were not true friends but just preferred to hang around him because of Gatsby's wealth.

In the American dream as portrayed in *Great Gatsby*, money comes with social class. Wealthy people belonged to higher social class. Everybody desired to have money to belong to this class, and this is why the characters were willing to give everything to have wealth. In fact, money bought love in *Great Gatsby*. Daisy reunites with her former lover Jay Gatsby when she found out how Jay Gatsby has made so much wealth. Myrtle also developed an affair with Tom Buchanan because of Buchanan's wealth. In American Dream, money is everything. Kevin Kwan sharply contrasts this notion. The upper echelons of Singapore wealthy exhibit a different lifestyle and how they carry themselves. Even though they care a lot about money, they do not think that money brings social class to anybody. Rachel refused to marry Nick Wu despite finding out that Nick is a wealthy man. *Crazy Rich Asians* gives a wonderful insight into how the contemporary lifestyle affects the themes in the current writings.

After understanding the problem that African Americans face as presented by Coates, Baldwin, and Ward as well as the concept of the American dream, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Barbara Kingsolver's *Poisonwood Bible* takes us back to the root cause of this racial tension. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a story about a voyage up the Congo River. Marlow, the narrator, goes to Congo to meet Kurtz whom he had heard great things about. At this time when Conrad wrote this story, the British Empire was at its

peak since it had a lot of colonies all over the world. Achebe also wrote about a period when the white men were invading the Nigerian land. He explains the responses that the traditional Nigerian people gave the white men invasion. Some collaborated with them while others like Okonkwo resisted this invasion bitterly. I actually don't know a lot about the events that occurred during the colonial period, but I have read many stories and historical account about this dark period. I am now glad to have read these two books since this topic often triggers curiosity in me.

Marlow travels to African in the service of a Belgium company rather than a British Company. He uses the map showing different colors each representing imperial powers present in Africa. The yellow patch which Marlow calls "dead in the Centre" represents the Belgium Congo. King Leopold of Belgium treated this particular territory as his personal treasury. Marlow during his adventure of Congo met many people from the European nation, who are willing to do everything to make a fortune for themselves. However, Marlow's motive is different from that of others, he went to Africa to adventure and not to make a fortune for himself. Throughout his book, Conrad uses colors such as white and black to reference light and darkness. The whites view themselves as a superior race, and their civilization was, to themselves, a light that would drive away the darkness in the African territory. Marlow realized that the Europeans were so brutal in dealing with the native Africans. Relating this to *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates mad me understand that this kind of oppression and brutality was not only in African colonies alone but also experienced by the black immigrants in the United States. In his letter to Samori, his fifteen-year-old son, he talks about the racial differences that existed between the whites and the blacks. He says that blacks were often marginalized and growing up in poverty. The title of this book is so appropriate and tells it all.

*The Heart of Darkness* possessed by some people who used others even at the expense of others' health and life just to gain wealth and power. In other words, the Belgium officials possessed the heart of darkness.

Achebe's novel focuses on the Igbo people, a clan in Nigeria. Achebe is an Igbo himself. However, he does not hesitate to criticize some aspects of Igbo culture, and at the same time, he does not overlook some aspects of Igbo collectivist and democracy. Therefore, he allows the reader to develop a sensible perspective on African society. The protagonist, Okonkwo refuses to collaborate with the Whiteman and rejects the new British order. Okonkwo takes on the Whiteman's invasion sharply contrasts Baldwin's perspective. According to Baldwin in his letter to his nephew, he posits that it is the blacks to accept the whites and not the other way around in order to resolve the country's racial tension. Suppose Baldwin was present in Nigeria, he could be one of the collaborators. But perhaps his perspective on racial integration is hugely influenced by the fact that he stays in the United States where there are probably more whites than blacks and blacks are marginalized.

Conrad employed various literary techniques in his novel. For examples, he richly used symbolism. "A continuous shower of small flies streamed upon the lamp, upon the cloth, upon our hands and faces." In most of the literary works, flies are used to symbolize death, particularly because flies often hung around dead people. Marlow indeed witnessed many deaths of the natives on the hands of the Belgium officials. Light and darkness have also been used symbolically to represent the African culture which the whites referred to as darkness and light which represented western civilization. Conrad uses first-person narration in this passage to pass his information. Since the story is about exploring a foreign land (Congo), the use of first-person narration is effective in convincing the audience that every information accounted for in the story

was experienced by the narrators themselves, and this adds to the reliability and accuracy of the information. Conrad, however, uses two different types of the first-person point of view throughout his story; a peripheral first-person narrator and central first-person narrator.

The peripheral first-person narrator is unnamed and also talks to other three listeners who are only identified by their professions. The central narrator, Marlow, later gives a lot of insight into the story. The first unnamed narrator introduces the story. Apart from the first-person narration, Conrad uses other literary devices such as symbolism for examples; he uses flies to symbolizes death. Flies usually hung around the dead hence the use of this symbol is easy for the reader to connect and understand the events that are symbolized. The story is an adventure, psychological thriller, and suspenseful one. The choice of genre is appropriate, especially in the colonial period. A Whiteman, Marlow, goes to a foreign land to meet someone whom he considers his hero making it understandable that the story could contain elements of suspense and thrilling events.

Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* is an indictment of western colonialism and post-colonialism which exposes cultural arrogance and greed. Each character in the story believes that they are bringing a superior way of life to Africa. They hope to overturn the inferior form of life of the Africans with their civilization and light. They believe that their religion is the best. It is however sad that the western nation plots for the assassination of Congolese president and replace him with its own puppet ruler. Taking the form of a political allegory, *Poisonwood* communicated the guilt that the whole of United States shares on their role in Congo tragedies. The guilt is narrated through the perspective of five women who tell of their personal guilts over the death of a daughter and sister as well as their public guilt over the role that they played in the tragedies of Africans. As one reads the story, the first question that should come in mind is, how

should one live with the burden of guilt? Since no one can provide an accurate answer to this question, Barbara Kingsolver prefers that the story is told by five different women each to give her take on the question of how one should live with the burden of guilt.

More importantly, the story has revealed the impossibility of absolute and unambiguous justice on a global scale. These five women had a different conception of justice. Adah gives up any lingering belief in the human-centric world, and what she thinks of justice in a global term. While anybody would argue that it is unjust for children to die from malnourishment and disease and thus doctors, medicine and food aids should be sent from the western world to such countries in Africa with such problems, Ada thinks that this good deed will only result in other deaths altogether. Deaths from overpopulation, deforestation, and extinction of species. She believes that no human being can balance life forms, life forms balance its self. In other words, she means that one life form must die for the other to thrive.

Just like *Heart of Darkness*, *King Leopold's Ghost* by Adam Hochschild, *Poisonwood Bible* also exposes the evil, brutality, and ferocity of the white maters towards the native Congolese. It is unfortunate that the same people who claimed that they went to bring light to the darkness turn out to be the devil that perpetrates worst treatments. *Poisonwood Bible* has demonstrated a high level of cultural arrogance that the whites had towards Africans. In *Heart of Darkness*, we realized from Marlow's narration how brutal the colonial power treated the subjects. Conrad starts his story at a setting in River Thames, which flowed peacefully and gracefully. It brought life to the people around.

On the other hand, River Congo was flowing towards the darkness of the world. It represented darkness and evil. How come those who viewed themselves as the light bearers became immersed in the state of greed and brutality. It turns out they were worse. One of the

books that we have not covered so far in this class, but I had a chance to read is *King Leopold's Ghost*. It also speaks about greed that clouded the whole operation in Leopoldville (Congo). King Leopold managed Congo as his personal property, and he could do anything possible to maximize the profit from Congo. So many natives died from forced labor, brutality, diseases, among other causes. This book gives a powerful insight into how the natives suffered at the hands of colonial powers. During the post-colonial era, Congolese never needed the so-called civilization or the light; they needed freedom. And the whole point of bringing light was a hoax and a blatant lie.

*Poisonwood Bible* uses a variety of literary devices which an aspiring writer can learn and employed in his or her personal work. The novel uses biblical allusion, "We came from Bethlehem, Georgia, bearing Betty Crocker cake mixes into the jungle." Leah Prices in the story, *The Things We Carried*, uses allusion from the bible. He refers to his hometown, Georgia as Bethlehem. Almost every Christian knows the story of Bethlehem. There is also use of onomatopoeia and alliteration in various instances. One example being, "Betty Crocker confederated her with the coin-jingling sinners who vexed Jesus till he pitched a fit and threw them out of the church" as onomatopoeia and, 'not so much as a Piggly Wiggly' as alliteration. Onomatopoeia and alliteration have been used in the novel to enrich the language.

*The Dream of Celt*, by Mario Varga Llosa, is another novel that gives a broad view on the issue of colonialization. It is not limited to Africa but traverses into South American and Europe. Several literary Europeans traveled through the Congo basin during the colonial period when the European rushed to harvest Africa's natural resources. Conrad, the author of *Heart of Darkness*, journeyed by caravan to Leopoldville by 1890. Conrad met Roger Casement, who is the protagonist in *The Dream of the Celt* in Congo. Just like Conrad, Roger Casement made his trip

to Congo with a mindset that the European colonization would bring moral and social progress to the inhabitants of Africa. Mario Vargas Llosa begins Roger Casement's story in Pentonville cell where he awaits news of his appeal against the death sentence. However, the bulk of the novel is made up of his memories of his years in Africa and then in Brazil and Peru working as the British Consul General and lastly in Ireland where he championed for Irish independence. His collaboration with the Germans to help him free Ireland from British rule cost him his life.

*Heart of Darkness* and *The Dreams of the Celt* both talk about the atrocities committed by the European powers especially Belgium against the native Africans. The reports of atrocities in the Belgium Congo were causing public outrage hence the British government appointed Casement due to his experience in the region as a Travelling Commissioner to the Niger Court Protectorate by the British Foreign Office. He was then promoted to be the British Consul in the Congo Port of Boma. He was to investigate incidences of the human rights abuse and report them to the British government. He undertook his task with zeal and presented his report in 1904 which made the British government to put pressure on Belgium and eventually changes were made. Casement became a public figure in the case against corruption. Roger Casement discovered the great lie of colonialism and then related this to his own Irish people. His turning point maybe when he witnessed a Belgium officer mercilessly whipping an unconscious Congolese boy with a line cord made of hippo hide. Also, during his assignment in Peru, Casement came across men, women, and children who are beaten, pilloried, mutilated and enslaved by rapacious employees of the rubber companies.

Mario Varga Llosa uses third person omniscient point of view where he describes everything that occurs in Casement's journey as well as every feeling. He is able to tell the reader what is happening in the minds of characters as well as taking the reader back through

flashbacks. The story starts and ends at Pentonville prison, but the bulk of the story occurs in the memories of Roger Casement through a series of flashbacks. Contrary to the narration in the *Poisonwood Bible* where the whole story is told from the perspective of five women who actually witnessed and experienced all which happened during the colonial and post-colonial era in Congo, *The Dreams of the Celts* give us all the accounts from the memories of Roger Casement through the use of third-person omniscient narrator. He is able to transverse through space and time to provide us with what was happening in British as Casement was in Congo as well as what was happening out in the public domain when Roger was in prison. *Poisonwood Bible* was majorly written to address how a person can deal with guilt. Coping with guilt need a broader perspective especially when the said guilt refers to the sufferings and death of other fellow human beings. This is why Barbara Kingsolver opted to use five different women to give their perspectives. However, In *The Dream of the Celt*, it is the person who tried to right the wrongs of colonial injustices giving us the story of how things went down through his memories. Both the two stories are similar in that the story is told from the those who actually took part in the events.

Contrasting *The Dream of Celt* to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe talk's from an African's (the oppressed) perspective. He also gives the accounts of all that happens during the colonization of Africa (Nigeria) through a story of a hero, Okonkwo. On the other hand, *The Dream of the Celt* tells a story of one who could have been the oppressor but choose to somehow be on the right side of history by talking about atrocities that happened. Casement then related colonialism in Peru and Congo to his own Irish people and concluded that there is no form of colonialism which is better. He wanted to deliver his people from colonization just as Okonkwo wanted to resist European invasion. It is unfortunate that both of them terribly failed with Okonkwo committing suicide and Casement sentenced to death. Just like Okonkwo faced

rejection from his people who collaborated with the European, Casement's genuine intention to make Irish free from British power was only recognized years later after his death. Sometimes the heroes are not appreciated until it's too late.

Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* is written in the first-person perspective and advice the black Americans how they can live in harmony with the whites. It addresses racial prejudice through the lens of a black man who doesn't want problems with his superior Whiteman. Baldwin knows that racial discrimination happens, but we don't see him directly describing the atrocities that the black man in the United States are subjected to besides the social and economic disadvantages he mentions. From *The Dream of the Celt*, I have learned a great deal of information about how colonial powers treated South American colonies and African colonies as well as how the issue of colonialism was viewed in Europe.

It has been a fascinating literary journey starting with Coates and Baldwin as they talk about issues affecting African Americans. The literary journey then goes back in the times during the beginning of this racial tensions when colonial powers were scrambling for partition of African territories and the atrocities that the natives Africans underwent. Many of them were taken as slaves to the new world, America, and some died due to forced labor, brutality, and diseases. This explains the existence of many African Americans in the United States. However, the migration of Africans to the united states did not just end with slave trade and colonialization, many Africans still move to the united states till today but with new motives such as in search of better opportunities. Even so, African Americans still have several challenges to deal with. Chimamanda Ngozi's *Americanah* details this contemporary migration of Africans to the United States.

*Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi narrates the lives and relationships of two young Nigerians; Ifemelu and Obinze. It a tale of love, race, and immigration. Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman living in Princeton, New Jersey decides to move back to Nigeria after breakups. She sends her first love a mail about her decision to settle back in Nigeria. From this novel, the reader gets to understand the issue of race, friendship, family, romantic relationship and immigration. Obinze and Ifemelu met in Lagos Nigeria in secondary school, and they fell in love immediately. They then decide to attend Nsukka university, but lecturers strike slowed the learning, and they both decide to pursue higher education overseas. From this point, a reader gets to understand that Africa or Nigeria has educational management issue and overseas education is considered better even in the post-independence era. This story narrates the life of a young, hard-working lady who is passionate about education. She works as a nanny while pursuing her university education. The American dream in this story becomes everyone's. Going to America was the saving card to Ifemelu who thought that her education was being slowed in Nigeria. However, the readers get to understand that Americans are also having their problems and going to America alone could not solve all her problems. Studying in America only provided the enlightenment but not the literal solution to the issues that faced people living in America.

In *Americanah*, many characters have fragile lives. Everything which seems precious became slippery and often crumbled too soon. They all underwent the experience of having and losing and regaining at some points. It is however funny that the mistakes committed by the characters in this story are never corrected, they pile up and become defining lives of the characters. Ifemelu's early love affair with Obinze, opened her to early exposure, her open love in a way stubbed her and even those whom she later loved. This story is indeed helpful in enabling contemporary readers to compare the two cultures, Nigeria's and America's. In *Between*

the *world and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates explains how it is hard to live in the United States in a black body, explaining to his nephew the challenges that they had to undergo. He states that being black, you have to try more than the white counterparts and blacks are at disadvantaged both socially, politically and economically. Compared America during Ta-Nehisi Coates and the one Chimamanda lived in; there is a little but noticeable change from my own judgment. Ifemelu became a blogger earning her fame. Even though she worked as a nanny for the better part of her stay in America, there is light at the end of the tunnel for her that America signified prosperity for blacks and whites alike.

In *The Great Gatsby* by Scott Fitzgerald, American dream was just an illusion. Everybody worked hard to attain their American dream which did not bear any fruit. To his disappointment, Nick Carraway later realized that the fortunes he admired were not made an honest and hardworking way but through illegal means. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu works hard to gain her fame and move from poverty to richness. It is not only the whites that viewed African institutions to be weaker regarding services but also the blacks themselves. It all starts in the *Poisonwood Bible* when Price family moves to Congo to introduce Christianity and western culture including western education. They viewed the African culture as inferior often being referred to as darkness. This notion also infiltrated the minds of the Africans themselves. For examples, someone with an overseas education is considered to have a better education than those who earned their degrees from the local universities. However, in this story, Ifemelu and Obinze had a genuine reason for going overseas to finish their college education.

According to James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Africans must learn to live with their white counterpart for the betterment of themselves. This stance comes into play in this story when Ifemelu had to take odd jobs regardless of pursuing university education including

working as a nanny to white women. Suppose that Ifemelu was in Nigeria, she couldn't have settled for such jobs. She realized that she had to humble herself to accomplish her passion. According to James Baldwin, it is true that the blacks have suffered racial discrimination in the hands of the whites but by being bitter about it could not have any positive effect on the blacks. Instead, the blacks had to devise a way of tolerating the whites and peacefully coexist with one another. This is exactly what Ifemelu did when she got to America.

In *Things Fall Apart*, we are presented with the image of precolonial Nigeria. People living in grass thatched houses and deeply rooted in their traditions and cultures. The cultural practices of the Igbo people are presented. Comparing the Nigeria where Okonkwo lived and that where Obinze and Ifemelu lived and later reunited, we see a great deal of advancement. However, it goes without saying that Chimamanda sees Africa from the perspective of poverty. When the attention shifts to Africa as Ifemelu makes up her mind and send a mail to Obinze, we see Obinze in a Range Rover and a beggar with a rusty hair glued on the outside of the vehicle until Obinze finally give him a 100-naira note. Chimamanda is of the opinion that there is a great deal of economic disparity, with the rich owning big cars and houses like Obinze and the poor begging on the streets.

Lastly, this book makes it clear that it is not only in America where somebody can pursue a dream and finally achieve it. Obinze comes back to Nigeria a poor man. Through the connections, Obinze establishes himself as a businessman and grows to become a very successful one. I have learned a lot from this book as I make a reflection and connection to other book written back in history. I have realized the change in the attitude about America, from that of Ta-Nehisi Coates and James Baldwin which saw America as oppressive to the black. Chimamanda sees American as having great opportunities to the black since they can attain their dream here in

American even though there are challenges just as everywhere else. Chimamanda includes the aspects of Barack Obama's campaign and election as the first Black American as the President which is a further reason to believe that African American status has greatly improved.

Twentieth-century writers journey then took me to a country torn apart by war, in a decrepit room, a beautiful woman tenders to her husband who is reduced to a comatose state by a bullet on his neck. The husband is not only abandoned by his companions but by his brothers too. One day, this woman, felt that she had to get somethings off her chest. She starts a solitary confession to her husband lying in a supine position. She recounts to him her childhood, her dreams, her sufferings, she talks about her desires, and her frustrations. She touches her somewhat older husband and kisses him. She could never have done these things to her husband despite having been married for ten years. Therefore, this man in his vegetative state becomes *syngué sabour*; a patience stone which when placed in front of a person absorbs all the plight of the person who confides in it. This magical stone according to Persian mythology shields a person from sufferings, unhappiness, pain, and miseries. This book is *The Patience Stone* by Atiq Rahimi.

This is an intimate story as the woman shares with her husband all her secrets, things she can never share with any other person. At first, the voice of this unnamed woman is affectionate, "your father read me poems and told me stories. He encouraged me to read, and write, and think. Because he loved you." But the more she confides in him, the more complex the story develops. At first, she dutifully tends to her husband. She administers some medication to him, in both of his eyes while holding prayer beads, feeds him from the drip, bathes him and moistens his eyes. She is left to take care of him and their two daughters. But after a lifetime of silence and censorship, the woman begins to pour her heart out.

Through her confession, the reader gets to learn that before her marriage to this man, she had been captured by a merchant who forced her to have sex with multiple men. She could not tell this to her husband were it not for the vegetative state of her husband. Sexual purity is highly regarded in the Islamic community. She was married to him in his absence as he was busy in the war. During the wedding, only a portrait of him stood next to her. When the hero returned from the war, he did not regard her as his wife but just as a possession. Islamic culture is different from the European and African cultures.

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, we see the Price family consulting and working together as they prepare for their missionary Journey in Congo. Even though the father could make the final say, the opinions of the Orleana Price and their daughters were often put into consideration. Nathan Price did not take Orleana but rather a human being with an opinion. Going on with her confession, the woman tells that it took her husband three years to have sex with her. And the first day they had sex, she was in her periods, so she bled. Her husband noticed the stains and believed that she was a virgin, and this made him love her. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, the protagonist has three wives. The man is regarded as the head of the family, and women offer support to the man. The status of women in the tradition Igbo culture is of course lower than that of the man but not seen as a possession. It is a fact though that the social status of a man rises with the number of wives he has. Polygamy was accepted just like in the Muslim society where a man can marry up to four wives.

The society where women are seen as just possession sees a dramatic reversal of roles; the hero lies helplessly and more powerless than even a child. His life is in the hand of his wife who takes care of him, from feeding to bathing. And his wife confirms, "I can do anything I want with you, I can talk to you about anything, without being interrupted or blamed." However,

despite passionately and affectionately talking to her husband at first, her pain and dissatisfaction with how men dominate the society are shown through her words. She remembers an occasion when her husband forcefully slept with her then beat. She puts her fingers between her legs, waving them between her legs and then wiping them on his beards. She says, “You were born of this blood. It is cleaner than the blood of your own body!” By this act, she goes against the Islamic belief that menstrual blood is impure. According to the Muslim faith, there is no blood other than the bloodshed of holy war and that from tearing the *virtuous veil* during sex with a virgin is clean. The woman also reveals more about the portrayal of women in this society.

She recalls her father selling her 12-year old sister to settle a bet her father had placed on his quails. He had placed too much money on one of his quails, and when the quail lost the fight, her father had to sell her sister who was only 12 years to a 40-year-old man as a bride to settle his bet. This story within a story tells us that females in this society could be traded at will. It like just taking one of the property when you are going through financial crisis and selling out to make some money. Her father could also beat them up for not taking care of the quails and have them locked up in a cellar for two days with the rats. This is a very inhuman treatment that Afghan women undergo.

Despite all the things this woman has gone through in her life, the beatings, the rapes, and mental tortures, she is a survivor and above all a good wife. She is aware that the situation women of her society find themselves is not the one they would love to live. She asks her husband, “If you ever come back to life, will you still be the same monster you were?” But she goes on to give herself an answer, “I don’t think so, I convince myself that you will be changed by everything I’m telling you. You are hearing me, listening to me, thinking. Pondering.” This woman is a heroine; she is a heroine for speaking on behalf of countless women who have and

are undergoing the same situation like hers. Rahimi also reminds his readers that the story told is one just a one woman's story but of countless women by not naming the woman in the story.

The woman recounts, "I didn't go and seek counsel from the Hakim, or the mullah. My aunt forbade me. She says I'm not insane or possessed. I'm not under the spell of a demon. What I'm saying, what I'm doing, is dictated by the voice from high, is guided by that voice. And the voice coming out of my throat is a voice buried for thousands of years." In short, she says that her story gives voice to thousands of women who cannot stand up for themselves and speak. *The Great Gatsby* also gives close relation regarding how the society sees a woman to *The Patience Stone*. When Daisy gives birth, she remarks that she is glad her baby is a girl, and she hopes she will be a fool because that is the best thing girls can be beautiful little fools. (Fitzgerald). The society in which *Heart of Darkness* was written also see women as naïve individuals who has lost touch with the reality. Marlow states, "Its queer how out of touch with truth women are" (Conrad). These words from Marlow prepares the reader how the mental state of women will be approached throughout the story. This society viewed women as inherently less grounded. In *Heart of Darkness*, women too are unnamed and only mentioned through their relationship with a male character such as Marlow's aunt and Kurtz's Intended, the knitting women.

In *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie, women are portrayed as important people in the society who can pursue their dreams and make it in life on their own. Perhaps this is because Chimamanda is a feminist. In *Americanah*, women can be heard in the society, Ifemelu, earns her degree, even though through hardship, becomes a writer and a blogger through which she successfully shapes opinions about racial issues. This is different from the Nigeria community where *Things Fall Apart* was written when women were subordinates to men, they were to be totally submissive to men. But a lot has changed between these two-time frames. It is sad that

*The Patience Stone* is written in the modern era, but women are still undergoing this kind of treatment witnessed in this story. The ending of this story is so sad and disheartening. The man in the story wakes up from the coma, and her wife sees this as a miracle. Sadly, he murders her wife for being impure and letting herself be raped. Men in this society control everything about women and even decides if a woman's mistake is worth death. *The Patience Stone*, a mythical stone to which you tell your troubles and when it finally bursts, you are free from your torments, the stone indeed burst and finally ends her torments. Her cold body lying down horizontally and the flies buzzing all over her.

Another novel that talks about the plight and portrayal of Muslim women is *Memoir of a Woman Doctor* by Nawal El Saadawi. Saadawi wrote this novel in the first-person perspective which reads like her own autobiography trying to go against all the odds to become a doctor but using unnamed woman protagonist. The reader gets to understand the worries and desires of Egyptian women through the narration of the protagonist woman. She feels discriminated as a woman and seeks to fight against this patriarchal and traditional society in which she is raised. She hates how her community has raised men to be treated like gods while women are looked down upon as weak and ineffectual beings. She says, "Who was the society anyway? wasn't it men like my brother brought up from childhood to think of themselves as gods, and weak, ineffectual women like my mother?" Because of how the society viewed women, the protagonist hated her own gender. "I hated being female. I felt as if I was in chains – chains forged from my own blood tying me to the bed so that I couldn't run and jump, chains of shame and humiliation" (Saadawi 12). This notion of male superiority in this society starts with the family where women have accepted their fate and are expected to teach their daughter to follow the status quo.

Egyptian women wanted to change this status quo; the protagonist wanted to show to her mother that she is better than her brother and to the whole society that she was better than many men. 'I hated my femininity, resented my nature and knew nothing about my body... I was going to show my mother that I was more intelligent than my brother than the man she wanted me to wear the cream dress for, than any man' (Saadawi 22). Being a doctor helped this woman to realize that discrimination and inequality that exist between men and women is due to the society's backward point of view. She begins to understand that if a woman has desires and inner power, they can achieve their highest goals. Being a doctor helped her to search for equality for herself. She experienced a series of disadvantages due to her gender but still managed to achieve her dream of becoming a doctor. As she recounts, 'Medicine was a terrifying thing. It inspired respect, even veneration, in my mother and brother and father. I would become a doctor then, study medicine, wear shiny steel-rimmed spectacles, make my eyes move at an amazing speed behind them, and make my fingers strong and pointed to hold the dreadful long sharp needle. 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' (Saadawi 23). Her passion for studying medicine was to show others that females can also be doctors, holding dreadful long sharp needles making others including the feared male gender frightened.

Being the only female student in the dissecting chamber, she had to hide her fears. At some point, she felt like turning and running away, but her determination would not allow her. "I almost turned away and ran out, but no, I wasn't going to do that." As soon as she decides to dissect this male body, her fear of men completely vanishes. She realizes the vanity of the male glory and power. Soon after death, male and female become equal and don't even know what is

going on around them. The absurdity of the perceived male superiority becomes more apparent to her in the dissecting room. Her course was starting to give her what she wanted.

This novel is similar to Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* in many aspects. Both the women in these novels feel discriminated and inferior to men. Both the societies have taught women to submit to men totally. Women's work is to serve a man. Both authors give voices to the protagonists. They can eventually realize that being seen as weak and ineffectual is unfair, and in both cases, the protagonists take bold steps to change the status quo. Unfortunately, even though the women in both novels know that it is unfair to discriminate against female gender and embark on the journey of changing the situation, the real strength is revealed only when a man is in a helpless state. In *The Patience Stone*, the woman only gets to speak up to her comatose husband. She could not have confessed the things she says were it not for the vegetative state of her husband. Same to *Memoir of a woman doctor*, the narrator knows this low state of women in the society and vows to change it, but her real powers is revealed when dissecting a dead man's body. It is only here where she realizes that a man's glory is vanity and male superiority is absurd.

But the vanity and absurdity of a man's superiority are not the only things that her career taught her. She narrates the ethics of practicing medicine and her transformation from a rich, successful but a hard doctor to caring and dedicated doctor, "Being a doctor meant giving health to all who needed it, without restrictions or conditions, and success was to give what I had to others" (Saadawi 100). The reader gets to understand this transformation when she acknowledges her empty life then followed by her encounter with musician companion character whom she fell in love with. "For the first time in my life, I felt that I needed someone else, something I hadn't felt even about my mother. I buried my head in his chest and wept tears of

relief." (Saadawi 100-101). Throughout this literary journey, only Chimamanda's *Americanah* and now *Memoir of a Woman Doctor* documents how women resorted to education to increase their quality of life and equality to men. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu became an important person in the society after achieving her education and starting her blog. Education made her important and influential. These two books have given credit to education as the primary factor in bridging the gap between male and female. In other novels such as *The Great Gatsby*, women seek to increase their lot in life through their association with men. These books continuously expand the readers' worldview, from understanding colonialism and race to understanding the portrayal of women in the Arabic world including what women have to undergo in their bid to change their situation.

From the Muslim world, the global literary expedition took me to China where a man is in pursuit of the meaning of life. People often look for the meaning of life. Every person at least in their adulthood is in pursuit of something that they deem important for them. Sometimes people get uncomfortable in life and look for what can give meaning to their lives. As a result, they indulge in various activities such as learning, hobbies and professional careers. In Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*, a man is searching for the meaning of life. Gao Xingjian was diagnosed with cancer and had only a few years to live. But luckily, about six weeks later, his second examination revealed that he had no cancer. He had won a reprieve from death and thrown back in the world of the living. He embarked on a fifteen-thousand-kilometer journey to remote mountains of ancient forests in the southwestern part of China and then back to east coast within a period of five months. The journey took him into ethnic minorities of people living along Yangzi River. Early during his journey, he heard of Ling Shan, the soul mountain and devoted his time trying to locate it.

The narrator spends most of his time during his journey in natural reserves and forests and talks to the forest and range rangers, local residents and archaeologist. He laments on deforestation and remarks on the threat of extinction of pandas, cranes, tigers and golden monkeys. He found out that most of them are from the local ethnic minority communities. He meets and talks to the local elders, something that gave him delight. He also details his observations and findings of the plant and animal species that he found during his journey. The narrator's journey took him to his home province, Jiangxi. His homecoming makes him remember his late mother and grandmother. He stays away from cities but occasionally visits cities and finds city people who know about his writing works and he seems to enjoy their company for a short time. The novel ends in Beijing when some people sought assistance from the narrator. He decided to offer no help to his visitors and remained an observer. He realized that he wanted to continue living in the puzzling, confusing and cruel human world and his journey offered him no understanding of the meaning of life.

The novel opposes the destruction of the environment and biodiversity in several locations that the narrator visited such as forests of Shennongjia in Hubei and Guizhou's Caohai which is an important habitat for the migratory birds. The narrator mentioned how China is on the harmful path of destroying its biodiversity, for example, he mentioned a real incident of killing a giant panda called Hanhan by poachers. "Hanhan came before Beibei 39 and was killed by a peasant called Leng Zhizhong. They had been getting Hanhan's signals from the same location for some days and, thinking it was seriously ill, set out to look for it. Finally, under a fresh mound of earth in the forest they dug out Hanhan's carcass and its neckband which was still giving signals" (Xingjian 40). At times, the narrator encounters landscapes that are untouched by human activity. For examples, he navigates through pristine forests of Linden and maple. His

journey sometimes spurs in him the longing of the ancient landscape when the environment was still prime, and the aesthetic value of the environment was at its best. Soul mountain explores the perception of an individual within the totality of nature.

The novel also describes the general topographic of the Chinese landscape. It also looks closely at different flora and fauna that the narrator encounters during his journey in a vivid way. He talks about a young man's encounter with the entire family of tigers. Contrary to the famous belief that tigers attacks and people, the young man and the Tigers looked at each other and walked off. "It's people and not animals that are frightening!" He tells me that as a young man he encountered three tigers on the same day. The mother and her cub walked off right past him, and then the male came up to confront him. They looked at one another, and when he looked away, the tiger walked off. "Tigers generally don't attack people, but people are stalking tigers everywhere" (Xingjian 40).

The soul mountain addresses the issues that face nature in general. It shows how beautiful the Chinese landscape is when it is not manipulated and affected by human activities. It reminds of the aesthetic value of the environment. It also communicates the value of the biodiversity that due to recklessness and careless of the human population, many are going into extinct. He believes that animals generally have no problems with people but people. Tigers don't attack people unless provoked. In his journey of finding himself, the narrator found his country. He found how that the country has lost the most important responsibility of taking care of the environment. In his last chapter, Xingjian found did not find a meaning for life. "I don't know where I am at this moment; I don't know where this realm of Heaven comes from, I look all around. I don't know that I don't understand anything and still think I know everything. Things just happen behind me, and there is always a mysterious eye, so it is best for me just to

pretend that I understand even if I don't. While pretending to understand, I still don't understand. The fact of the matter is I comprehend nothing, I understand nothing. This is how it is." (Xingjian 504).

*Soul Mountain* is an incredible epic novel where the author was able to describe the landscape and the flora and fauna he encountered. It is rich in poetry and the history of China. This novel has given me an in-depth understanding of the nature of the Chinese landscape and animals such as panda and tigers which are only found in the region. There isn't any novel that we have discussed so far that addresses the issue of environment and nature to the extent that this book has discussed. In the heart of darkness, the landscapes such as river Thames and Congo were used just for the purposes of the symbolism of the African and western culture. This novel is a call to action for all governments and individuals to take up active roles in conserving the environment and taking care of biodiversity. Most people living in the cities have lost touch with the environment. This novel is an inspiration to such people to spend some time to visit ecological sensitive regions. This will make them understand that their actions have significant impacts on the environment and they need to be environmentally conscious. Nature is beautiful. People should protect the environment to improve its aesthetic value and their health because if this destruction continues, toxicity and cancer will be the result.

After exploring the plight and portrayal of Muslim women in Saadawi and Rahimi 's novels, Jennifer Egan takes her readers back in time during the great depression and world war II to analyze the roles that American women played during those tough economic times. The *Manhattan Beach* is set at a time when the country was mired into the great depression and world war II was looming. Egan uses a narration style called anticipatory narration. This is a method of narration when a character delays response to an action or a dialogue, but at the same

time, the mind paces ahead. Egan has used this style with elegance enabling her to build breathless anticipatory passage by passage throughout her novel. The protagonist and the heroine of the novel, Anna Kerrigan is close to her father for the main reason that she appreciates and admires her father for his effort to keep the family in some comfort even during the tough economic times. The novel opens when eleven years old Anna Kerrigan accompanies her father, Eddie Kerrigan to a business meeting at one of the Manhattan beach houses where they meet Dexter Styles.

The issue of family relationships and responsibilities comes in at the introduction of this novel. Eddie takes Anna to accompany her to a business meeting, a meeting that turns fateful for all of the three characters. Egan notes that the Kerrigan family had enjoyed some good times before. "Planned to buy the curb on the curb exchange which was more affordable than the New York Exchange. Not that money was a problem. He brought Agnes a Russian sable fur and a string of pearls from Black, start & frost. He hired a maid to clean up in the afternoons. He engaged a tailor and ordered suits from England and bought champagne for Agnes and a dozen others at the Heigh-Ho and the Moritz after the shows." Kerrigan family, however, did not enjoy this good life for long. The family is hit by two waves. First when Anna's younger sister, Lydia is born crippled majorly caused by a condition called cerebral palsy. She cannot speak either. To afford a chair that would enable her to sit upright, Eddie Kerrigan had to resign dockworker union business to work for Dexter who is much younger than him. The second tragedy is the disappearing of Eddie himself a few years later after the beginning of the second world war. Anna and her mother are forced to work extra hard to provide for her sister's needs. Anna works at the Brooklyn naval yard, inspecting military battleships spare parts. She is 19 and mature enough to be the family breadwinner.

Gender difference and sex are also discussed in several instances in this novel. She had to beat all the odds and prejudices from her co-workers in her bid to become a professional diver repairing ships. Breaking the stereotypes that women cannot do such jobs, Anna is respected. Anna also takes the breadwinner role in her family, that is pretty good for a lady of nineteen. Egan has also used sex as an intellectual, personal exploration rather than infantilize it as mere emotions and feeling. Anna practices ownership of her sexual emotions. Egan renders it a sincere and almost intellectual exploration while not abandoning the pleasure. At 14, Anna already had a sexual experience with a boy named Leon in a storage paddock. "Once inside [the paddock], they moved with the stealthy rapacity of burglars.... but soon enough, layers of clothing began to yield to the marvel of bare flesh... After each small advance, Anna promised herself they had done enough... But the greater logic they were yielding to contain an inexorable will to progress" (Egan 120). Egan presents Anna as innocent yet during her first sexual experience. "Anna couldn't picture what they were doing: proof of her innocence. In the dark paddock, she slipped from her life like a pin dropping between floorboards. *I don't know what you mean; I haven't done those things*, she imagined saying, truthfully, to a faceless accuser. *I don't even know what they are* (Egan 120).

Egan uses symbolism in the novel. Tabatha's Flossie Flirt Doll which Anna covets upon seeing during the business trip in chapter one is used to symbolize the wealth disparity between Styles and Kerrigan's families. The ripe tomatoes in Mr. Q's greenhouse during the dead of winter and which he gives to the members of his syndicate symbolizes the limitless powers of Mr. Q. He is able to produce the summer vegetables during the winter seasons thereby defying the law of nature. It shows how limitless he is and able to successfully develop a genuine business during this hard economic time. The ocean I also used to symbolize the unlimited

powers of human beings. Anna beats all the odds to become a professional diver doing underwater ship repairs.

Egan's novel relates closely to *The Great Gatsby* as both narrates stories of people striving to make ends meet during periods when the United States as a country was undergoing a hard-economic time. In the *Great Gatsby*, Nick Caraway moves to West Egg to looking for wealth. West Egg is dominated by the young rich, those who had made their fortune within the few past years like Gatsby himself. Women in *The Great Gatsby* also tries to increase their lots in life through different ways ranging from genuinely working hard in business or having affairs with the already rich people. It is not clear why Anna falls in love with Dexter Style, a man to whom she is as young as his daughter. Perhaps because of his wealth and fame. Just like Gatsby who gains her wealth through illegal business, Dexter also rise to fame and wealth as a crime boss. The kind of prejudices and biases that Anna faced when she wanted to be a professional diver repairing ships is also witnessed in Nawal El Saadawi's novels like the *Memoir of a Woman Doctor* which narrates a story of a woman who had to beat all the odds to becomes a doctor. Being a doctor is a profession believed in the Egyptian culture to be a male profession.

We find that Anna also tells her secrets to her crippled younger sister, Lydia. Lydia is suffering from Cerebral Palsy which affects her speech too, and she can only make sounds mimicking what has been said to her. But it turned out that nobody knows Ann like Lydia knows her. Ann only tells her secrets to Ann. Why would Ann tell her secrets to her sister who cannot help her in her conflict? Just like in Rahimi, *The Patience Stone*, the protagonist tells her secrets and confession to her comatose husband. She could not tell them to him in his active years. She finds her secrets safe with a man in his vegetative state just like Anna finding her secrets safe with her crippled sister who could not talk too. This story makes an important connection

between the American society during the great depression and world war II era to the Muslim society in the contemporary world in many aspects including the portrayal of women as beings with limited potentials and also turning to those who cannot help them in their situations to tell their secrets.

My global literary expedition ends with Abraham Verghese' *Cutting for Stone*. The story revolves around conjoined twin brothers Marion and Shiva Stones whose mother; Mary dies during the delivery and father Dr. Thomas Stone goes mad due to the grief of Mary's death and abandons his children. The story begins when Sister Mary Praise leaves India for Africa to work as a nurse. The ship she was travelling in suffered a typhoid outbreak and Mary struggled to provide medical care to the passengers who were affected by the outbreak. While attending to the passengers, she meets Dr. Thomas Stone with whom she falls in love.

When Sister Mary first meets Thomas Stones, Stones is very ill. "She rinsed out the bucket and put it back within his reach. She mopped up the mess on the floor with a towel, then she rinsed the towel out and hung it up to dry. She brought water to his side. She withdrew, wondering how many days it had been since he'd eaten anything." Stones survived and later requested if she could accompany him to Ethiopia where he was contracted to work at a mission hospital called Missing. Verghese chooses the name of this hospital to symbolize what could later happen in the novel when Dr. Thomas Stone goes missing after the death of Mary in childbirth. However, Mary refused to accompany Stones to Missing hospital as she had promised to undertake his job in Aden, Yemen.

In Yemen, Mary is raped at her post, an incident which made her leave Yemen for Missing to join Thomas Stones. The two worked for seven years side by side without showing any romantic affection towards one another. Later, Mary who had claimed to be a celibate nurse

gets pregnant and goes into labor with twins. Everybody in Missing knows that Thomas Stone is the father to her twins except Thomas himself since the incident happened when he was drunk. Mary dies in childbirth, and Thomas goes mad with grief and runs away leaving his children in the hands of a resident gynecologist called Hema and her husband Ghosh who together raise the twins happily.

The twins grew loving their parents Hema and Ghosh but often wondered why their birth father, Thomas Stones abandoned them. Marion occasionally daydreamed that their birth father would return for them. Marion develops an obsession towards his best friend called Genet. He often fantasized marrying her. But Genet instead lost her virginity to Shiva. Marion is hurt due to this and his love for his twin brother is destroyed. Genet later joins a rebel group which planned a coup. Marion is named as suspect forcing him to relocate to the United States to avoid arrest and continue with his medical studies. Before going to the United States, Ghosh is diagnosed by leukemia and on his deathbed asks Marion to find his birth father and tell him that Ghosh had forgiven him a long time ago for all the mistakes he committed. Ghosh also wished Marion success in his studies.

Marion moves to the United States and settles at Our Lady of Perpetual Succor. He thrives here under the guidance of Chief Residence Deepak who is admired for his competency in surgical works. One of the visitors who visit Deepak happens to be Thomas Stone. He is distressed and seems never to have recovered from Sister Mary praise's death. The two set up a dinner meeting where they discuss about the death of Mary, Marion's mother. They had a strained relationship for several years. During Marion's time in the united states, Mario and Genet got back, and she infected Mario with hepatitis. Stone is forced to immediately sends for

Shiva and Hema from Ethiopia. Shiva donates half of his kidney to Mario, an operation which led to Shiva's death, but Mario survived.

Verghese uses first-person limited omniscience point of view as the story is told from Marion's point of view. The story spans several decades including the events which took place before he was born, Marion gathered much of the information about his parents from other people's accounts, and he simply put them together to form a narration. The story is Marion's personal journey into knowing who he is and the hidden stories about his family. Throughout the novel, Marion is blatantly honest about his fears, his insecurities and his vulnerabilities in life.

The theme of family bonds is well portrayed in Verghese book. Shiva and Marion demonstrate this theme as the two are born as conjoined twins. Marion says that being separated from his brother is his earliest memory. Throughout their childhood, the two slept in the same bed and often end up lying head-to-head. However, this bond is broken when Shiva sleeps with Genet, Marion's long-term best friend whom Marion had fallen in love with and often fantasized marrying and raising a family with her. Marion is deeply hurt and thinks that he will never forgive his brother for betraying him. However, Verghese makes a point that family ties can never be broken. When Marion fell ill, and Thomas Stones send for Hema and Shiva, Shiva agrees to donate half of his liver to his twin brother. The operation left Shiva dead, but Marion survives. It seems as if Shiva paid his betrayal with his life, but these are the decisions that people are bound to make at different instances in life. It is true that during our lowest time in life, we can only certainly count on our families. In *Great Gatsby*, after Gatsby is murdered, all his friends ran away except Nick Carraway but then his old father after learning about the death of his son, had to travel from North Dakota where Jay Gatsby grew up to come and bury his son.

Verghese also showed that suffering is inevitable in human life and that people should learn to deal with it if they cannot avoid it. Verghese has explained how Sister Mary Praise suffered until her death after giving birth to her twin sons. As a result of her death, Thomas Stones flies from Ethiopia to the United States where he cannot overcome the pain of Mary's death. Thomas becomes mad despite his status as a renowned surgeon specialized in liver issues. Marion realized that Thomas often collects stones into his home trashing it. Marion also becomes terminally ill after contracting hepatitis from Genet. This kind of sufferings are normal and common in life, and people should learn how to live with them. The novel also takes place in the hospitals in most of its scenes. Hospital is a place characterized by sufferings and pain.

The novel also explores the theme of passion and career. Marion was determined to be a physician from a tender age. "I grew up, and I found my purpose, and it was to become a physician" (Verghese 14). Marion views his passion of being a physician as his entire reason for living. It wouldn't find a reader by shock that Marion wants to become a doctor as his entire life was lived in the hospital. But his use of the word "purpose" gives his dream of becoming a physician nobility as though this is his calling by a higher power than his own heart and mind to pursue this career and help other people. His twin brother also pursued medicine back in Missing as he pursued his in *Our Lady of Perpetual Succor*.

Verghese also points out the influence that role models have in people's lives as they pursue their dreams. "I chose the specialty of surgery because of Matron, that steady presence during my boyhood and adolescence." "What is the hardest thing you can possibly do?" she said when I went to her for advice on the darkest day of the first half of my life (Verghese 15). The narrator in *Memoir of a Woman Doctors* also has a similar passion for being a doctor but there is a significant difference in motives behind their passions. The woman narrator in the *Memoir of*

a Woman Doctor grew up in a society where women are looked down upon. The Egyptian society believed that women could not be doctors and the narrator's passion and motivation to become one was to challenge this gender stereotype and prove to the society that women too can be physicians.

Verghese also integrates political scenes in his novel and the issue of going into exile which was common in African countries soon after their independence. Even though Ethiopia was never colonized, it wasn't immune to political environments that defined African countries soon after most of them got their independence. Genet joins a rebel group that attempted to overthrow the government. Marion's name was somehow mentioned and to evade arrest, Marion flew to the United States where he reunited with his father before finally reuniting with Hema and Shiva.

*Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese presents to readers what it feels like to pursue a passion, live with foster parents, being disappointed, suffer from illnesses but still, life goes on. This was the life of Marion Stones. From this book, readers can learn to persevere in their pursuit of their dreams while having an open mind that sufferings and disappointments are sometimes inevitable in life.

My twentieth-century literary expedition has made a profound impact on my literary development. I have learned a great deal of literary styles used in various literary works studied throughout this journey. Different authors used different writing styles which I keenly noticed and analyzed in each book. I have also learned a lot about different cultures. The novels studied cut across different cultures such American society during the great depression, world war II, post-independence and modern times, Muslim culture, African culture in pre and post-colonial

times as well as some South American cultures. I was able to analyze the differences and similarities between different cultures during my weekly readings.

I have developed multi-faceted thoughts and revelations concerning my literary journey. I have learned how humanity survived during periods of great adversity. After learning how the African Americans faced atrocities at the hands of the colonial masters, I realize how important it is for human beings to observe the Golden Rule and treat the other as the self. I was not for the idea of affirmative action until after reading these books about colonialism. These stories, novels, non-fictional accounts, and other manifestations have exposed me to greater truths about human beings than any other aspect of society has. Although most of the books reveal the tragic and dark side of the history of humanity. I have noted that the plight of African American is changing as they can be elected to high political offices.

The books about the role and portrayal of the Muslim women in Muslim society has also given me a greater understanding of how Muslim society treats women. Even though most of the works studied so far are fictions, they shed some truth on what happens in real life in such cultures. Nawal El Saadawi confirmed during the interview with NYU's Professor Keefer that most of the issues she addressed in her books are the things that affected her and the entire female gender in real life such as female genital mutilation. I am however glad that women have gradually earned their rightful position and respect throughout history. The modern societal perspective about women has greatly improved across most cultures from being that of weak and ineffectual beings to being strong and important beings who have the capability to enhance socio-economic, environmental and cultural changes and development.

All the books studied throughout this semester are useful and I liked all of them as each gave me distinct content and knowledge about different aspect of life. However, I would love to

meet Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and ask her how she managed to cope up with life in the United States after migrating from Nigeria and how she managed to overcome all the problems immigrants face as they try to settle and adopt new life. This class has been everything I thought it would be and even surpassed my expectations. I look forward to applying knowledge and concepts learned from this class in various aspects of my future personal, academic and professional journey.

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