

MAJOR 20TH CENTURY WRITERS FINAL

SHAHID MAHDI

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PROFESSOR JULIA KEEFER

Table of Contents

Works 2-8 contain both first drafts replete with corrections as well as a rectified version based off the Professor's comments.

1. **Introductory Essay**
2. *Between The World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates
3. *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin
4. *The Fire This Time*, Jesmyn Ward
5. *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald
6. *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad
7. *Poisonwood Bible*, Barbara Kingsolver
8. *The Dream of The Celt*, Mario Vargas Llosa
9. *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*, Dylan Thomas
10. **MIDPOINT CCC**
11. *Woman Point Zero*, Nawal El Sadaawi
12. *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi
13. *Patience Stone*, Atiq Rahimi
14. *Night*, Elie Wiesel
15. *Cutting For Stone*, Abraham Verghese
16. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain
17. **CCC FOR SECOND HALF**
18. **Works Cited**
19. **Closing Remarks, Thanks & Acknowledgments.**

A GLOBAL, CHRONOLOGICAL EXPEDITION: MAJOR 20TH CENTURY WRITERS INTRODUCTION

The ultimate emphatic triumph of human history that it has, by virtue of generational advancements, been able to evoke feelings within itself. We attempt to conjure mastery and ephemeral stories that capture the fleeting prowess of the human spectrum. The 20th century's canon of works focussed within this course best reflects the aforementioned statement more so than any other. The story, the novel, the non-fictional account, the periodical and its other manifestations have exposed greater truths about ourselves than any other aspect of society has. From the profligate work to the layman's newspaper, the advent of the story has been the most magnificent mirror into our desires, dreams, yearnings and tendencies known to our species. Moreover, each respective work manages to communicate the respective era's *zeitgeist* effortly. The notion of *zeitgeist*, or "spirit of the time", is certainly an element worth exploring extensively. The works we have pored over, cried with, laughed within, and rummaged within for profundity never seem to fail us.

Yet, just as the lustrous luminosity of perfection, peace and harmony strike us, so too do the macabre, obscure, menacing corners of the human spirit. Ones that shudder and carry out hateful acts, ones that issue prejudiced slurs, ones that mercilessly pillage lands and lack human decency, care, or propriety in the slightest. I'm a firm believer that, as someone who has been immensely privileged to live across four cities and yield a multi-cultural background, problems aren't validated as issues until the previously mentioned scientifically charged, analytically bolstered light of morale, reason and retrospection comes into play.

This is why, throughout the works of the authors we've read so far, it causes me great anguish, but hopeful resolve, to declare that the following midterm shall be oriented towards the more diabolical side of humanity. The notions of the "*other*" are all intricately explored throughout all the works I propound today as well as their corresponding CTs. All of the works we've read thus far unfortunately more or less in their brilliant yet tragic turbulence manage to encapsulate, at times, the dread, horror and hopelessness expressed by humans. Now, however, we are of ripe fettle to explore and confront this once and for all. Shining an acerbic, assertive light on these moments provides further insight into the horrific struggles and responses to the dark, unkind and unforgiving world that once environed these authors and characters. My final shall be formatted in commonplace fashion: Corresponding chronological CTs as per the timeline of the course, replete with mini insertions about how book X has informed my intellectual autobiography. At both the midpoint of the CTs and the conclusion lies a connecting, interweaving CCC to tie together some of the broader concepts explored in the aforementioned works. I adjusted all my book titles to encapsulate ITALICIZED BOOK TITLES ;) as I know I've not always adhered to italicizing book titles as per standard required MLA format in my old mannerisms; thus I have rectified this thoroughly replete with the remainder of the MLA formats (12 point font, indent, in text citations and bibliography style). I hope my cumulative work makes for thought-provoking reading. It has been an honor and pleasure to be in this class thus far. Please ensure to read my final note of thanks to you on the final page of the portfolio. Enjoy!

Kind Regards,

Shahid

BOOK 1: "BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME", TA NEHISI-COATES

Few works in the social stratosphere manage to strike such a contemporary, hearty chord as Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between The World and Me* does. The work, fashioned as an epistolary non-fictional manifesto to his young son, is sure to enshrine itself in the echelons of contemporary literature for years to come. I had first familiarized myself with Coates' work during his time as a correspondent for the Atlantic. On one fine morning, while doing a quotidian web browse for news, I stumbled upon an excerpt from *Between The World and Me*. At the time, Black Lives Matter protests were pervasive, their aftershocks further spread by the continuous news of merciless shootings. A disturbing, racialized pattern was beginning to emerge, yet *Between The World and Me* seemed like a sort of respite from the cruel chaos. And I cite it as being this not due to the fact that it dodges or cloaks the issues at hand, but because it approached an extremely delicate, polarizing and outraging issue with inklings of eloquence, grace, animation, nostalgia and above all, a much-needed pensive commentary that was lacking in all other media narratives. To extract and magnify just one of the many masterfully crafted quotes found within the work was an arduous task in itself. There are several elements of the work that I shall perhaps magnify in a later, revised and extended Close Reading. But there was one passage that captivated me with its notoriety, frankness, alarm: "I am sorry that cannot make it okay. I am sorry that I cannot save you...Part of me thinks that your very vulnerability brings you closer to the meaning of life, just as for others, the quest to believe oneself white divides

them...The difference is that you do not have the privilege of living in ignorance of this essential fact". (p. 107) While Coates navigates the reader through various chronological periods -- including, in my opinion, the most intriguing facet: his own time in college esconcing to the meaning of being Black critically around him-- this seems to be one of the first chunks of content that sees Coates apologizing to his son for the world that may antagonize him purely on his skin color. Coates manages to juxtapose a fortitude of strong-willed and unwavering sentiments with a knack for the delicacy and fragility of the Black experience. As detected in the aforementioned passage, it is revealed that he believes that there are aspects of gratitude involved in the decisions that he is powerless to make. The essence of the line "Part of me..." is encouraging and wistfully cordial. It admonishes his son with the adage that, in being a minority, in possibly being subject to prejudiced behavior, in managing to subsume the entirety of America from the good to the bad, he will approach the universe with the sort of critical and contemplative lens that someone who doesn't belong in a minority may not. Those who are white, and by the stroke of the course of history have been visualized as being the conquerors, live, to paraphrase Coates, in a constant state of "ignorance is bliss", wherein the ignorance is the delineation between minority and majority. The close reading of this quote in particular makes me feel as if Coates never intends to shelter his child from the underlying sinister attitudes towards African-Americans that certain incidents have shed light on. In lieu, he is raising his son and seeks to empower him as being a "conscious citizen" (108) of the world. If one is truly cognizant of the world around him or her, they proceed with rejecting the personified, capitalized notion of the "Dream" which seems to be saturated with the premise of false promises . The "Dream" is sort of a romanticization of a state of content that in reality is that much more distant from minority populations. In fact, it is

America that Coates often positions as being his ideological dartboard. When contrasting the historical rapports between countries and accompanying African-origin or Black populations, Coates waxes lyrical about France in what seems to initially be a non-sequitur but in truth ends up coagulating itself as a major point of national contrast. In America, Coates propounds that African-Americans “are their ‘problem’...their national guilt”, whereas in other nations like France and Algeria -- both of which have, through sometimes cruel colonial erstwhile activity, subsumed significant African-origin populations -- the experience of being Black is immune from the American cast fishing pole of the “Dream” and its accompanying “Dreamers”. For it is the Dream, as the author didactically indicates towards the close of the book, that swept us up in the whirlwind of enslavement and peril in the first place. (151). In one of his most stringently built up instructions to his son, Coates writes: “Do not struggle for the Dreamers. Hope for them.” (151) and in doing so, allocates them into being the utter antithesis of their moniker: harbingers of the volatile, racialized and colonial reality that much of today’s world order was built upon. Reading *Between The World and Me* was an absolute pleasure, and one of the most all-encompassing graceful works of nonfiction I’ve had the fortune of reading. As with Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* or, to utilise a more contemporary example, Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*, some of society’s most prevalent issues need their outlet for a productive catharsis to follow. Coates *Between The World and Me* is certainly phenomenal enough to assume that role.

The grand takeaway for me from this work was the narrative style and structure. The epistolary form, popularised in Bram Stoker’s epic *Dracula*, has always been a style I wanted to emulate, especially considering how letters can encapsulate such a wide range of human emotions that the conventional narrative style can’t. I feel as if using the epistolary style is a

gateway for further experimentation -- and Coates novel isn't exactly a posterchild for "normal", dreary books -- it is a perennial triumph of experimentative, ambitious, unwavering writing.

BOOK 2: "THE FIRE NEXT TIME", JAMES BALDWIN

Conflagrances Now and Next: Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* The epistolary format is one that knows no limits; it can possess the fortitude of formality or the candidness of raw, human emotion. Following the excellent Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between The World and Me*, this week we segue into what could be described as being a spiritual predecessor to the Atlantic contributor's work: *The Fire Next Time* by the seminal James Baldwin. The work, from 1963, was considered to be the foremost voice of Black and or African-American experience within a much more hostile, unaccepting and bellicose United States. It is bisected into two sections, the former of which is epistolary, and the latter of which draws heavily on a more memoir-rooted, autobiographical narrative tone. There are several chunks of text that are worth thorough context based analysis, and an intriguing, yet unjust, dichotomy can be constructed between the content of the work and the perilous circumstances that envired African-Americans in the 1960s. While I found the overarching tone of the book to be conciliatory and less outraged than other works I've read on similar topics, there are many 1 insightfully alarming quotes, passages and conclusions Baldwin extracts with little difficulty. For it is this insurmountable grapple that must

be propounded in order to confront the abrasive reality that falls between them. 1 As opposed to say, the work of Franz Fanon, whose brilliantly charged literary aggression conveys passionate urgency within his renowned *The Wretched of the Earth*. And that specifically is a topic that truly engrossed and fascinated me: the concept of a constructed reality disseminating, and the consequent rallies against it. This is eloquently touched upon in a fantastically all-encapsulating manner: “Something very sinister happens to the people of a country when they begin to distrust their own reactions as deeply as they do here, and become as joyless as they have become...The person who distrusts himself has no touchstone for reality--for this touchstone is themselves...Therefore, whatever White people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves” (p.43) The spectrum of human emotion and all its intricacies is displayed. In Baldwin’s view, has the majority, in this instance the white population, not managed to grasp the sentiments that African-American populations have to deal with? Baldwin elucidates the sheer joylessness of the African-American experience has in itself created a new reality. This prompts me to wonder: Does the efflorescence of Blues music, or the Harlem Renaissance, or the roots of soul all result in an effort to tackle and deny this reality, or were they bountiful cultural movements that flourished within it? Brutalities and crimes committed that targeted specifically Black populations ravaged for so long that it was probably dreadful to confront the surroundings that incarcerated their rights and freedoms. The blurring of the reality that they’re expected to spouse and the distortion of a homeland is exacerbated by the tumult that the Second World War brought on, Baldwin seamlessly narrates. On page 54, an extensive reflection hits a reality-smashing climax, when Black soldiers are forced to watch how “German prisoners of war are being treated with more dignity that he has

ever received at their hands...he is far freer in a strange land than he has ever been at home. Home! The very world begins to have a despairing and diabolical ring.” I am brought to resuscitate another renowned author, Salman Rushdie, and his reflections on the lack of cultural delineation between India and Pakistan in his non-fiction brief “Imaginary Homelands”. Indian writers, in a Western country like England, have two traditions to abide by: First and foremost, with no choice, they are expected to adhere to the principles and standards of the homeland they have migrated to. That being said, the second tradition emerges from the sole fact that the minority exists: “It is the cultural and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group...in examining what we have in common with those who preceded us to this country, we can begin to do the same”. Baldwin and Rushdie are generally united in their quest for assimilation, yet what on a conclusive note what seemed to really grok my attention was the notion of a discombobulating reality. “The American Negro has the great advantage of having never believed that collection of myths which white Americans sling: that their ancestors were all freedom-loving heroes...Negroes know far more about white Americans than that.” Burdened by a torturous past at the hands of colonial mentalities, African-Americans are of the mature mettle to end the racial nightmare once and for all, or so Baldwin believes. A “consciousness” must be newfound and created, not extrapolated upon by attitudes rooted in the past. I found Baldwin’s work riveting, and unfortunately rather timely in the wake of recent racially charged events. But it goes to show the sounding conch of rationality and a yearning for justice shall prevail as we all collectively struggle to prevent a global entropy.

My autobiography felt greatly linked to this work on the premise that, amusingly enough, Baldwin’s language and diction and my own are not far apart. He too opts for florid, wondrous

words every now and then, often in keeping with the *zeitgeist* that the more embellished something was, the better it was. I hope to emulate his pulchritudinous marriage of functionality and aesthetics.

BOOK 3: "THE FIRE THIS TIME", JESMYN WARD

The odious conflagrations of racial relations in the United States has prompted me to investigate a specific topic further. In my previous CT, I stood upon the brilliant mastery of James Baldwin to propound the inquiry: Did art generated from African-American populations serve as an escapist respite from the conditions they face, or did these movements flourish as a direct response to the tumult and turbulence environing them? Casting the scholarly gaze to Jesmyn Ward's fortitude of essays, *The Fire This Time* (a spiritual successor to *The Fire Next Time*) is a fascinating work to help answer this thesis. In it, she invites a plethora of perspicacious authors and poets to contribute to what eventually unfolds as being a grand, telling literary portrayal of racial relations in the United States today or since Baldwin's magnum opus first hit bookshelves. One of the works, all scattered and diverse in their form and content, that I found to be most appealing was Clint Smith's *Queries of Unrest*. I elected to zone in on this particular insertion as I've historically been enchanted and interested in poetry's role within racial quandaries, given that it as a form is often is bereft of the direct conventions and precision usually offered by fiction or creative non-fiction that orbits around said topic. One poem that I've read before is Amir Baraka's *Dope*, which I cannot emphasise as a recommendation more. It dwells with this notion of a falsified reality served copiously to African-Americans. While the poem itself is lengthy -- I'll attach a venerated reading of it by its author -- the voice of the work is centred upon an African-American man or woman who has been forced to the point of delusion and

crippling addiction, absolving several controversial racial figures of their wrongdoing. The irony, humor, and above all sheer tragedy and awareness this work induces is mind-boggling. Smith's 'Queries of Unrest' manifests itself as a poem centred around diction that is emblematic of the fear and uncertainty many African-Americans face: "Maybe". "Maybe I come from where the sidewalk ends...Maybe I'm scared of writing another poem that makes people roll their eyes and say, 'another black poem'. Maybe I'm scared that people won't think of the poem as a poem, but as a cry for help." The poem attenuates to a close, shrouded in bleakness. The micro-usage of Maybe gives the reader cultural insight, but it most importantly reveals the liberation of choice. We decide what to do, for it is we that must take action against these injustices and racial prejudice. Do we see this poem as a poem for artistic sake, or as a sounding board for marginalization of African Americans? Later on in the work, Smith discusses the aspect of "running away from one's own skin" -- are African-Americans forced to do this? Maybe so. 1 It is truly heartbreaking that Smith feels like the statements in his work, which are genuine, revelatory pleas for understanding what it's like to be an African-American growing up in certain parts of this country are being dismissed by the masses as 'another' work. Of course, there are several other routes and patterns to shed light on and expose in order to smoothen and better racial relations with the ultimate goal of living in harmony. I hope that Ward's "The Fire This Time", and works similar in nature, manage to disrupt the notion of the ignorantly charged "another" mentality. To revolve back to my opening question -- which I seek to answer in chunks throughout the semester -- : Authors within Ward's collection, as well as seminal figures like Toni Morrison, Amir Baraka, and Claudia Rankine propel works that respond and address racial injustices, rather than escape from them. They do so simultaneously alongside the

decades-long creation of an incredible African-American literary canon, from Frederick Douglass to Ta-Nehisi Coates and all in between.

In terms of my own biography, I found Ward's noble effort to go above and beyond normal expectations. For her work isn't homogeneously hers -- in lieu it is the transmogrification of collaboration; it transcends one voice and manages to *unite* with its distinct voices rather than separate.

BOOK 4: "THE GREAT GATSBY, F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor." Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, p.78. In *The Great Gatsby*, questioning morality and deliberateness is a dominant yet subtle theme. The populace of the Eggs are shrouded in a vortex of recreative wealth, and we must inquire into what the very meaning of success and satisfaction was to this generation. Possibly for certain members of this privileged, brazen class, happiness wasn't simply estivating among friends with one drink in hand and cigar in the other, it was actually striving for a purpose, an attainable goal that, upon completion, would sculpt out their perception of long-term happiness. The above quote is the point in the tale wherein Nick reveals that Mr. Gatsby himself is one such figure- a man with a clarified purpose. The quote leaps out of Nick's mind after Gatsby has successfully reunited with his long-lost flame, Daisy, whom Gatsby had been enamoured with for the past five years. Much has occurred in that time frame, including Gatsby's period of service in the war and Daisy's marriage to the hulking Tom Buchanan. Despite all of this, Gatsby has continued to idolise Daisy as the the key to his happiness. He has toiled his way up from broke (a janitor) to bountiful (a cross-dealing tycoon) all for the heart of this woman. The quote can be construed in two ways. The first mindset to scrutinise this observation has more to do with Nick than it does with Daisy. What is stirring within his mind? Is he jubilant, enraged, or enlightened? In this situation, it is rational to argue that Nick could be jealous of this love that he essentially helped to rekindle. Now that the prospect of Gatsby realising his dream is

almost confirmed, Gatsby may feel that he can repudiate himself from all the unnecessary accomplices he collected over the years in order to find his love. Needless to say, Nick falls into this category. Thus, Nick's concealed axiom is that his friendship with Gatsby shall be jeopardised as a result of Daisy's renewed presence. Nick doesn't communicate to us whether he wants to retain Gatsby as a long-term confidante, but upon completing the book we readers can affirm that he clearly has a secretive, childlike gusto for the great man (46). Although Nick declares that he "disapproved" (158) of Gatsby upon meeting him, Nick can't refute that Gatsby has cemented himself as an influential figure within Nick's social principles. Another method to intake the quote with is one that dwells more with spirituality rather than the repercussions of friendships. The idea of purposeful meaning is a concept that strikes us readers, possibly because we are astonished that it barely figures in any of the "Egger"'s intentions. Thus, when this quote is emitted, it is quite groundbreaking, as, for the first time in the story, we bear witness to the evidence of a goal; an accomplishment. Gradually, it is evident that Gatsby is not simply a vulpine, friendly figure who lives to "socialise" (ironically, Nick mentions that the guests "...paid him the subtle tribute of knowing nothing whatever about him." [61]) but a man who is straightforward. A true rarity, Gatsby really is a diamond among emeralds- although the society around him possesses luminosity in terms of appearance, only Gatsby has the cerebral clarity to excavate a goal and adhere to it. If life's quality is the result of the choices we make, perhaps those who are able to use their initiative to identify, question, and realise their paths are those who we should admire. Sure enough, dilly-dallying is by no means a vice; though it should be enjoyed in moderation. The characters that surround Nick are all doused with wealth and reputation; the very same that "twinkled hilariously on his [Gatsby's] lawn" (61-63). They see no

need to continue to toil as they either have people doing so for them, or they simply can't be bothered-"Why exit this blissful lifestyle when I'm already satisfied?", they may ask. Their greatest fault is that they aren't able to acknowledge merit and personal achievement. Gatsby chooses to propel himself into true happiness in a similar, glitzy, hyperbolic fashion, he does so to sugarcoat himself for Daisy- to reclaim her love. In fact, it wasn't even whether he succeeded in accomplishing this goal or not that mattered-it was his drive for it. Amidst the magnitude of *The Great Gatsby*, I was invariably led to question these concepts in my own life, especially as we string together our intellectual autobiographies for the course. What did I grok from the quote? More importantly, what did I digest from Gatsby's Odyssey-like quest to reconquer the heart of Daisy? The truth dwells on themes that are omnipresent within the course of the tale, and hovers in the quote. They fall within two categories. The first is the importance of managing and having relationships. Be it in the 1920s or today, those whom you encounter within your life will ultimately define your persona. These people range from your family to distant accomplices, and, believe it or not, will all form their own formations within your blueprint. I, for example, consider myself a highly independent soul. With hindsight, I realise that, ultimately, there is a limit to how truly anomalous or unique one can be without reliance on those we know. Solitary, ambitious folk can develop into world-beaters, but their strengths are all based off shared resources in the society he or she is reared in. I've found that, regardless of skill or ambition, we all need our accomplices. With this in light, Gatsby unfortunately ultimately failed to build any well-founded friends. The only slight companions he wound up with by the time of his death were Nick and Mr. Wolfsheim, the latter of which was a mere business partner who didn't bother to attend Gatsby's funeral. Gatsby was so enamoured with Daisy that he didn't care to form

rapports with anyone (unless, of course, they aided him in his voyage for love) . Nick, in a melancholic tone, cedes that friends of Gatsby's "...were hard to find." (169).

With regards to my own biography, I, on the other hand, strongly value my friends and professors- they are my insurers, my consultants, my advisors, and everything in between. I'm fortunate to admit I have people whom I can go to for comfort, advice, and a light hearted jest. Moreover, I've found that many concealed lessons can be withdrawn from the people around you, be it a musical skill or a simple moral value. That being said, I'm sure if one was to examine all the people they've known in their life, they could learn a lesson or two from each and every one. The second lesson that we must acknowledge is that of purpose on a grand scale. Gatsby, from his premature, scheduled days (173) to his fiery confrontation with Mr. Buchanan (130), is constantly fighting for a goal. However, since Gatsby's decisions were fuelled by purpose rather than pragmatism, he was devoid of both the joyous aspects of life and adhering to his true self. Gatsby's choices and status prevaricated in order to obtain Daisy. Although Gatsby may have emerged from a "womb of purposeless splendour" (78), his inability to control his aims led to his tragic end. Nick's quote secretly exposes how, if one's attention between managing relationships and striving for goals is incongruous, then consequentially his or her life shall inevitably spiral into downfall. This may be difficult to achieve, as both purpose and networking are immaterial, but then again, so is happiness.

BOOK 5: "HEART OF DARKNESS", JOSEPH CONRAD

Few novels are so idiosyncratically shrouded in sinister magic as Conrad's magnum opus, *Heart of Darkness*. A truly renowned work conveys the trials and tribulations of colonialism's wrath, especially when its rapacious fingers extend to that which is unknown and unfurl into a state of frenzy. I had always looked forward to sinking my teeth into such a revered, significant novel as I've longed to learn more about the mercantilist, imperialist attitudes and subsequent literature that has derived from it. As the waves of scholarly progression have seeped into the shore of political correctness and re-iterated analysis, many truths have been unearthed about antiquated or even fairly modern works. This is to further communicate that certain literature or art has been composed from the first quarter of this century and earlier have been re-examined to purposefully extract the oft malicious and abhorrent viewpoints that may not stand as being even remotely pleasant today. While Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* contains a smorgasbord of potent imagery and questionable, anachronistic cultural commentary on the presence of African-Americans, there are a number of debating topics privy to us when we synergize the celebrated work with another literary giant's utterances on the topic. Chinua Achebe is a world-class scholastic force; his masterpiece *Things Fall Apart* has propelled him to the highest echelons of the published author world, and his article as a direct correspondence to Conrad's work makes for enlightening reading. Achebe rightly underscores the blatantly racist, dreadful portrayal of African Americans by the author and his narrator, and seeks to dispel the ignominious behavior that the colonial trade company members adopt. He launches a cerebral,

intriguing thesis to encapsulate his argument within the article *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'*. 'That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked...Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as a human factor.' What follows this extract within Achebe's work is the casting of Conrad as a "psychoanalyst's dream" in terms of the now deceased authors attitudes to all that is foreign. And it goes without saying that Conrad's epithets and adjectives geared towards African natives within the book is animalistic, cruel, and without much thought for the people native to the territory now formally labelled as the Congo to be identified as people at all. Yet, I also found at times that Conrad's work was questioning the idea of imperialism and all its tenets itself; a series of quotes and assertions that evolves to display a clear, overarching truth. Right at the beginning, as Marlow is regaling his Thames-crewmates with the commencement of the story itself, he proclaims that imperialism is nothing more than "robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind -- as is proper for those who tackle a darkness." (5) [Marlow's usage of the word 'darkness' may be a double entendre, but I think in this context, when applied to ascertain the goals of imperialists regardless of their location, he is talking about darkness as a manifestation of the unknown, not solely as a misguided characterization of native populaces]. One could argue the aforementioned quote is propounded with tantamount negative gusto as his remarks dedicated to the description of African populations. Here, in the expository stages of the work, as if to preface all the proceeding memories retrospectively, is another extract Marlow discloses about the intrinsic intentions of imperialism: "I was hindering your fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as

though I had got a heavenly mission to civilize you” (9). Are these iotas of sarcasm that are seeping out? I feel as if this is the case indeed. Some quotes seem to be tinged with exasperated irony from Marlow -- someone who has already endured the full, circular trauma of venturing out and returning back, albeit not in the same mental state. Moreover, I think Marlow does convey an understated sense of self-cognizance and awareness of his own mental infrastructure. He happens to impressively articulate, with thanks to Conrad, his hesitations and horrors that belie him. “I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of rapacious and pitiless folly ” (24). These barbed utterances are directed at the practice that percolates through nearly every component of Western society : imperialism. Thus, while Chinua Achebe sentiments are echoed and correct, it is important -- if not simply for a critical and scholarly -- to examine the internal thought chunks of the quizzical, afraid Marlow as he increasingly grows a sharp sense of curiosity for the ill-fated, crazed Kurtz. Juxtaposing and embracing a panoramic view of both source and aftermath commentary leads to more valiant and peaceful compromise; it widens the debate in lieu of settling it altogether. I’ve always personally been fascinated by colonial history as told by both belligerents in a specific context. Once more, the notion of shared but separate realities can arise to the forefront of the discussion -- with the mercantile country arguing they issued a decree of civilization; introducing the native country to engineering, infrastructure, educational methods, medicine, and so on and so forth. The occupied country can, as history has unfortunately diffused, always argue for the despicable violence, second-class treatment, and helplessness they experienced at the hands of their conquerors. Beyond that, on an entirely nascent post-modern level, the locals found in the occupied often end up emigrating -- to the origin country of their

occupier . This comes into play with regards to my identity, as I'm of both British and Indian origin, and have often felt split between the two; bisected by colonial aftershocks. Take a look at Britain: once the most widely successful territorial empire known to mankind, from China to the chunks of the United States and hordes of colonies in between, is composed of minorities including but not limited to South Asians, Far-Eastern Asians, West Indian/Caribbean, and African communities, all of whom have worked hard and contributed to the dynamic, diverse and fruitful identity of the country. It's always endlessly compelling how the same, factual history can be disputed by various sides and or sources.

BOOK 6: "POISONWOOD BIBLE", BARBARA KINGSOLVER

It is a rather refreshing respite to read a work that makes significant relation progress in terms of its classification of the "other", yet still illuminates a fascinating light on the colonial contrast.

Barbara Kingsolver's *Poisonwood Bible* saliently sounds equally as sinister as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but as we join the Price family as they acclimate themselves to the wondrous, fruitful family setting of the Congo. For this Critical Response, I wanted to divagate from the usual quote analysis and add a texture that I haven't done before: micro-quote analysis. This would include a grandiose, magnified focus on structure, technique, vocabulary, and so on and so forth. It goes without saying that every work we've read this semester merits this, but I noticed the extensive paragraphs within Kingsolver's seminal piece and found they summoned a necessity for further examination. What's more, the various points of perspective make for compelling reading, as each child (as discussed in both the NYU Classes Lesson and evinced in the book) seems to emblemize a different attitude towards the Congolese natives. Kingsolver's descriptive passages are dazzling, dedicated, and paced incrementally so that we absorb every minute element of the fantastic scene ahead of us. A rather lengthy passage on page 14 emphasises her blatant talent for the writerly absorption of nature, one of the most potent elements that contrasts from the traditional American suburban setting. "The deluge finally stopped just before sunset. The world looked stepped on and drenched, but my sisters ran out squealing like the first free pigs off the ark, eager to see what the flood had left us. A low cloud

in the air turned out to be tiny flying antlike creatures by the millions. They hovered just above the ground, making a long, low hum that stretched to the end of the world. Their bodies made clicking sounds as we swatted them away from us. We hesitated at the edge of the yard, where the muddy clearing grades into a long grass slope, then charged on into the grass, until our way was barred by the thousand crossed branches of the forest's edge: avocado, palms, tall wild sugar-cane thickets." The first notion I paid particular attention to was how Kingsolver varies sentence length. This prevents monotony and permits various freedoms, but also constraints. In my own writing experience (and this is a rather meta aspect to point out given that I am writing as we speak, and that the following assertion will incontrovertibly be proved by the submissions I have turned in), I tend to be florid; but often verbose and saturated. Kingsolver, however, makes use of incongruous sentences to propel the power of their content. For example, within the above extract, she talks about a "hum that stretched to the end of the world". There is no auditory information on that hum's pitch besides the fact that is arbitrarily low, or its decibel, or any further microscopic specifications. But, would those even be prerequisites to the reader's cognizance of this charm? Not at all. Kingsolver accomplishes a looming, overbearing, almost intimidating sense when she proclaims that. Kingsolver also easily tolerates the management of time. In writing a passage as wonderful as this, she enables a technique that I've often tried to emulate in my own fictional, or, at times, non-fictional works when appropriate: Grokking the ability to grasp a second, and stretch it out for what feels like eternity, especially when that moment had such a hard-hitting power or effect on one's life. And on this note, one occurrence within the book changes everything and is arguably the climax. The venomous bite on Ruth May condemns her to a toxic death -- a serious, alerting juxtaposition to some of the lighter or more

frivolous times that have transgressed amongst the children. However, even now, every word is calculated and deliberate on Kingsolver's behalf. For she strategizes the voices of Adah and Rachel to play out in a deliberate way. Adah's description of the fatal bite itself is vivid, limpid and, in a macabre way, intensively descriptive. Adah waxes continuously, addressing the "wide-eyed silence", the "bluish face" creasing, "her final gulp of air as hungry as a baby's first breath". Adah's voice is somewhat sanctimonious and pious: "Because I could not stop for death, he kindly stopped for me", quoting the immortal Emily Dickinson. To add another English literary allusion, the description of the snake, which is slow, stretched out and agonizing, is reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence's *Snake*. Rachel's task within the structure of the novel is to grapple with the immediate fall in action that pursues the news of Ruth May's plight. The unbearable, cinematic sort of tension comes to a true sadness not when the news is finally revealed, but when Rachel breaks down crying at the simple, innocent image of her mother asleep, entranced in a state of "her whole body just not knowing yet...The whole world would change then, nothing would be alright". The contrasting, differing voices of Adah and Rachel are sprinkled throughout the book in its multi-narrative style. But the effective, emotionally-stirring method that Kingsolver uses both of them here is indeed remarkable and enviable. As I string together my own series of narratives; my own trials and tribulations and stories (of which none involve fatalistic snakes, yet, thankfully) I look forward to embracing Kingsolver's descriptive techniques, the ability to stretch a second, and functional, enriching multi-perspective viewpoints.

BOOK 7: "THE *DREAM OF THE CELT*", MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

The curious case of Roger Casement, liberation extraordinaire, evades platitudes and can best be summed up by a single word: "Iconoclast". Novelizing a non-fictional character's life seems to always be a rather arduous technique, especially with respect to the creation of supplementary dialogue that may or may not have actually occurred. In this respect, it is wholeheartedly different from the biographical method of documentation. However, as we transition from our continental focus and entrench ourselves in a firmly colonial mindset -- of course also taking into account all its faults, oddities and peculiarities -- Casement's involvement with the Congo comes to light. One particular passage that underscores the sheer recklessness and disregard for egalitarianism is highlighted on page 48, as we move away from one narrative and cushion yourself in the other. "The Force Publique became embedded, like a parasite in a living organism, in the tangle of villages scattered over a region the size of Europe, measured from Spain to the borders of Russia, that would be maintained by an African community who did not understand what was happening to them, except red ants, and incantations that brought the sleep of death. Because the soldiers and militiamen of the Force Publique were greedy, brutal, and insatiable when it came to food, drink, women, animals, skins, ivory—in short, everything that could be stolen, eaten, drunk, sold, or violated." - P. 48, *The Dream of the Celt* Vargas Llosa, as with Gabriel Garcia Marquez -- one of my favorite authors and one whom I have attempted to emulate in various other exercises -- blends his fondness for languages with an acute, acerbic

description of a disturbing, European force as it trembles and rattles the mighty continent. I'm often intrigued, more so than anything else bar the historical connotations and metaphors, by the display of a guilty conscience in (I suppose primarily white protagonists) main characters as they traipse, shuffle and pillage through Africa, either as an individual entity or as a sort of emissary for a larger force (as many do on behalf of the indefatigable Leopold II). One highlighting instance of Casement, whose novelization is interestingly told in third-person, displaying a valorous amount of judgement and non-conformity is his confronting the auxiliary general on his treatment of a Congolese native boy. On page 57, Casement ambles into the situation, unreservedly exclaiming his title, his claim to knowing the general from prior circumstances, and how he should immediately refrain from lashing a young budding child. "...you undoubtedly know the laws of the Congo Free State. If the boy dies, he will do so on your conscience" (57). The general, as extreme an emblem for Occidental mercantile interests, replies sternly, to the audience's horror: "When I came to the Congo, I took the precaution of leaving my conscience behind in my own country." A message which intertwines bleakness with disregard for fundamental humanity. Yet, there is an endearing sense of pride that settles on the protagonist, Casement, as he attempts to stand up for what's unequivocally right. And this is perhaps symptomatic of other characters, including Charles Marlow in Conrad's infamous *Heart of Darkness*: the protagonists in these works are not always munificent and benevolent, but they are not monsters either. By conveying a sliver of humanity through even the most macabre of circumstances, we the audience are sometimes reassured by a better, more hopeful future even when the exploits described are horribly gruesome. Other elements of *The Dream of the Celt* I wished to explore and incorporate into my own-writing as I develop my intellectual biography

was Vargas Llosa's mastery of narrative and chapter structure. I think harkening to the work of Haruki Murakami, arguably Japan's most celebrated international author of late, is somewhat applicable. In his fantastic, dystopian romance *1Q84*, a spiritual extrapolation of the elements found within Orwell's *1984*, the chapters alternate in perspective between a female and male character. This distortive move often hurls the reader, with glee, to a completely new/arbitrary situation we wouldn't have been familiar with initially. Llosa masters this without making us feel lost: He seems to repetitively employ a technique I first learnt about in Homer's "Odyssey," known as *in media res*. This Latin term is a hereditary definition for being "in the middle of something". Many of the chapters within Casement's life begin with an immediate sense of engagement: a dialogue. At the dawn of Chapter VII, he is conversing with a sheriff before the latter is even formally introduced. As we sink our literary teeth into Chapter XII, we find our character contemplating a reaction to perilous news that foreshadows the proximate chapter's action. As with the bubbling escapades, constant clamor, and exhausting series of trials and tribulations that bore the lion's share of Casement's life, Vargas Llosa peppers the work with a divine beginning to his epilogue: "The story of Roger Casement shoots up, dies out, and is reborn after his death like those fireworks that after soaring and exploding in the night in a rain of stars and thunder, die away, are still, and moments later are resuscitated in a trumpet fanfare that fills the sky with fires" (481). It is almost as if the life of Casement was chronicled in this abstract, unorthodox, third-person slash memoir fashion to not simply share the introspection of a character that Llosa venerates, but to be "born again" and repeated scores of times, as if it some sort of parable for us to learn from. Epilogues, though capable of mind-boggling, tear-jerking magnitude, must be balanced in coordination with the ending of the novel -- this is something

that, in my own writing, I am trying to master. The epilogue permits a mechanism to reach out to the reader on their wavelength, to compress an intellectual, emotional or spiritual edifice you have erected for them to climb. What is the truth of all this? In a snide, almost jocose manner, Llosa shrouds the verisimilitude of the book with a layer of admission: Casement probably amplified and exaggerated his own diaries, he did not, as Llosa cryptically states, “live” all that he wrote (484). Yet, the aforementioned fragrances of life, revolt, courage and brilliance sparkle in the sky, and the iconoclast remains immortalized for all of us to witness. A fantastic read, and above all, a charming duality between the eccentricities of the subject and the sublimity of the author.

POEM 1: “*DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT*”, DYLAN THOMAS

[Dylan Thomas, 1914 - 1953](#)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

I found this poem to be exhilaratingly moving, as it harkened back to a lesson I once learnt wherein this poem was raised. It concerns the notion of transience -- the bittersweet epiphany that a moment won't last forever. In the poem, which is composed of five stanzas, Dylan transports us to a hyperbolic, eerie, ephemeral time chamber. We could be in the underworld, watching as the deceased souls float by us, their regrets a principal burden. For the "good night", to me, was interpreted as being a symbol of death itself. Thomas talks about how wise men "know dark is right", which could potentially mean that saliently, they're aware that night falls logically at the end of the day, or, on a more grandiose level, that death awaits at the end of one's life. It is, as I put the finishing touches on my midterm, an aesthetically charged reminder to never tire, but remain relentless in one's pursuit of beauty, especially that which is bittersweet.

The wild men who "caught and sang the sun in flight" seems to be a classic allusion to the cautionary parable of Icarus. Daedalus, Icarus' father, fashioned him seemingly invincible wings, with one premonition: fly too high, and the wax shall melt. Of course, as a perennial emblem of the exuberant narcissism and short-sightedness of youth, Icarus flew and paid the price of death.

Thomas uses a format known as *villanelle* to compose the poem. It is one I had to conduct auxiliary research on, as I was not heedingly familiar with this antiquated, rare template. It consists of five stanzas composed of three lines each, followed by an additional stanza of four lines, bringing our subtotal to nineteen lines overall. The literary expedition of poetic formats resuscitated the iambic pentameter within the works of William Shakespeare of which I have studied to great extents back in my native London. The element of cognizance of mortality had me tracking down the concept of *memento mori* in the Bard's *Julius Caesar*. The soothsayer in this work admonishes the ruthless, dictatorial Caesar of his impending doom, but, due to his social strata, is swatted away akin to a fly.

I truly am enamoured with this poem as I subsume it as a veritable adage for life. Inducing your output with passion, even as you "near death", is a phrase that I'd convert to an aphorism for my own

sense of being. What I do find fascinating about this work is, as clearly navigated above, its essential, universally inviting cordiality manages to include several different anecdotes and stories/mythologies over time, transcending a specific society and projecting a universal appeal. It makes us recline in our chairs, wherever we may be, and land upon an epiphany: time shall pass, but it should never extinguish our fervor for what we love and are passionate about. Franz Fanon, while penning his incredible *Wretched of the Earth*, was months away from dying -- and he ended up contributing one of the most evergreen, effective critiques of imperialism to date. I encourage everyone, no matter what they spend their time toiling for, to “rage against the dying of the light”, forever and always!

MIDPOINT CCC REFLECTION

Briefly tackling the monstrous notion of the “other” in these works is formidable due to the thousands of quotes, themes, passages applicable to the topic (even after the rigidity and academic inveigling of my aforementioned CTs throughout the semester thus far). For in many of these authors *magnum opi*, it is staring us in the face -- we are *often* hearing from the “other” itself.

The conservative normativity of the predominantly white viewpoint in *The Dream of the Celt*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Poisonwood Bible* manage to issue a dose of conscience. As illustrated in my CTs above, there are numerous moments when characters within these novels identify the (usually minority) in a pejorative way, and, bizarrely, don't even do so out of malice despite the language and tone that they employ. In another white-charged narrative, we intriguingly move away from race and position ourselves on class. Jay Gatsby's entire sole life “purpose” (a term dizzyingly analyzed *ad nauseum* above) is to stray away from the erstwhile struggling circumstances he encountered. The universal yearning for upward social mobility is a fabric threaded throughout many of the works we've read, and are also addressed within Coates' discussion of the dichotomy that arises when poring over Black identity and class combined.

Gatsby and *Heart of Darkness*, interestingly, manage to subtly diffuse the same mentalities and priorities, even though the former doesn't discuss race at length (with the exception of Tom Buchanan's proto-imperialist tirade on the rise of non-Western empires overseas from the comfort of his plush, divine platitude of a home). The air between these two books is still anachronistic in the sense that the righteous, moral truth of the time must be held within the white man; in doing so, the "other" is firmly blocked out.

As we shift towards the rampant tide of modernity, the "other" represents a massive shift, as we slip into the guise of it, and thus it is *now the predominantly white* authors that have been categorized and demoted to the status of the other. Their waxing lyrical about the echelons of prestige, wealth, colonialist plundering, pillaging and cultural sacking has now taken a back seat (though it seems as if, palpably, many sections of the world are still dealing with the aftershocks and ramifications of the reproachable latter) have, in what seems like an advancement of tolerance and supremacy, been stifled and distorted by the cries for freedom, the eloquent summons for justice, the funerary introspection of crimes committed. From Baldwin to Coates through Ward, there is a potent uprising demanding rightful equality and the essence of transparency. This is what I found to be the most potent element. While the efflorescence of language, the majesty of plot, the spectrum of emotion, and the tracking of the voice's journey is immensely important, tracking the oppositions in narrative throughout history- and being mindful of how we can slip between them, is also indelibly significant. We must hear from the other *and* its opposition, for the most comprehensive vision of justice is only ever visible with absorption from both sides.

History is unkind. Even today, the polarity and agony certain nations -- including the one we are in, regardless of how frenzied, fertile, and successful it may be, needs remedies. Sharpening our minds to quash ignorance and embrace the human conscience is a factor we

must take with us to the grave. Characters like Marlow, the Prices, Nick Carraway, all display a conscience, an active feeling of wrongdoing in their narratives, but they aren't rewarded or emboldened by it. It only takes one iconoclast -- for example, Casement -- to incite the embers of change.

Thus far, the masterpieces I've been privileged enough to read have all enlightened me in different ways. They've challenged, refined, reworked my cognition, altered misconceptions and have made me a more intellectually stimulating person. I look forward to the final as well as the second onslaught of knowledge and illumination.

BOOK 8: *WOMAN POINT ZERO*, NAWAL EL SADAAWI

Our thorough, monstrous-in-scope journey moves somewhat West as we delve into an Egyptian figure worthy of equivalent popular stature as Nefertiti herself. I was pleased when the illustrious Professor Julia Keefer gave the green-light signal to read any El Sadaawi novel we please, as I had a copy of *Woman Point Zero* and had been meaning to investigate for a while. I received the book in 2011 (although it was originally published in 2007 as a reprint of a 1975 work), as a sort of topical primer towards some key issues within the throes of the Arab Spring; a series of events that inverted the unjust and somewhat antiquated dictatorships yet also left an imprint of violence amongst many innocent, democracy-loving denizens.

The tale of *Firdaus* is not a pleasant one. The story of the protagonist, who allegedly is either roman á clef or genuinely a real prisoner El Sadaawi visited in Egyptian women's prisons, is one of harrowing, precise insight. The term "*firdaus*" itself is the Arabic translation for "paradise" within the Qur'an, and therefore there is a lace of tragic irony in what is about to transpire. This potentially harkens back to the Arabian Nights tradition of Scherezade, wherein the heroine is similarly trapped but has hordes of stories to share. El Sadaawi is capable of juxtaposing gritty, unfriendly detail with a deep, spiritually evocative, transcendentalist sense of self at times. On page 31, when describing an altercation, she effortlessly manages to propound a vivid description of the action at hand and simultaneously communicate an ethereal, semi-religious, almost hallucinatory description of what unfolds to her in a sensory fashion. The following excerpt screenshot...

unable to recall, or as if nothing had happened at all.

I closed my eyes and tried to bring back the scene. Slowly there appeared two circles of intense black surrounded by two rings of pure white. The more I stared into them the bigger they grew, expanding before my eyes. The black circle kept growing until it reached the size of the earth, and the white circle expanded into a piercingly white mass, large as the sun. My eyes lost themselves in the black and the white until, blinded by their intensity, they could no longer perceive either one or the other. The images before my eyes became confused. I could no longer distinguish between the faces of my father and my mother, my uncle and Mohammadain, Iqbal and Wafeya. I opened my eyes wide in panic as if threatened with blindness. I could see the outlines of Wafeya's face in front of me in the darkness. She was still awake, and I heard her say:

...manages to effectively diffuse the abstract simplifications that can manifest as a result of shock, trauma, or other negative bodily predicaments. Sadaawi is a dreamer, and tackles issues regarding women's equality with the same resolve and gusto as she does embrace atmospheric descriptions. It is common of authors when combatting strife, or perhaps they visualize a utopia ridden of oppression.

Her paragraph lengths, saturated with a smorgasbord of scintillating adjectives, remind me of another global, somewhat Eastern literary giant, Orhan Pamuk. I recall skimming over his book, *Snow*, and feeling adoration and reverence for how a scene can be magnified, withdrawn; emulating a camera's zoom-out, zoom-in feature. A brilliant passage on page 42 is much too long to paste into this document, but some of the focal highlights include but aren't limited to "There were people walking on the street who wore shabby, torn clothes and downtrodden shoes. Their faces were pale., their eyes dull, resigned, weighed down with a certain sadness and worry. But those who rode in cars had broad, fleshy shoulders, and their cheeks were full and rounded. From behind the glass windows they looked out with wary, doubting, stealthy eyes...when the bus

slowed down.. I could glimpse the jaundiced faces shining with sweat, and the bulging eyes expressing a certain fear.” As a lot of my writing existingly communicates is a sense of fanfare and parade. I often deliberately want my essays to sound like revolutionary, triumphant works, composed with the dichotomy of logic and creative vigor. What I seek to emulate of Saadawi's is the ability to have paragraphs that take variegated flight in their description, but land smoothly. What do I mean by this? Well, if one examines the aforementioned passage I extracted, we realize that she lands on the idea of fear. The “certain fear”, a.k.a. The last two words, is what conceives this particular moment, it is the be all and end all emotion in this cultural snapshot. To *cushion* work like this is duly amazing. The entirety of the paragraph is meant to convey one specific emotion to the reader, and by the virtue of chaos, congestion, polarity and cruelty, it does. On a grander scheme, it aids us in comprehending the levels of commitment Sadaawi will go to for us to merely understand this. Ernest Hemingway’s groundbreaking, minimalist, functional and efficient style isn’t necessarily harder or easier. Salman Rushdie or another descriptively rich author like Orhan Pamuk assert themselves on the world stage with a signature effect. I find el Sadaawi to come across as being a liminal author, centred firmly in the middle of this Venn Diagram.

As I pivot onto more non-fiction centred work for my amateur writing career, I’ll be sure to keep El-Sadaawi in mind as a true writerly champion. The notion of creative nonfiction or *roman a clef* works permit for more creative freedom, and I look forward to shining a flashlight on her infinite bibliography whilst also subsuming valuable syntactical and descriptive lessons.

BOOK 9: "PERSEPOLIS", MARJANE SATRAPI

One avenue that I don't necessarily have direct desires of pursuing but that I do distantly admire is that of filmmaking. My professional and academic nascence has, as the world's academic prioritization segue lists, always followed the liberal arts with a writing intention. But is there a liminal combination of writing and film in print? And if so, what are some of the intellectual ramifications of reading such a work with an awareness of form?

One particular course at NYU that I've taken which donned a revelatory nature was a Graphic Novel introduction. Alas, we did not ultimately absorb the anecdotal heroics of Spider-Man or Superman, in lieu, we opted to magnify works that often employ non-fiction topics but then consequently end up being gravely serious in content -- something of a truly surreal experience when engaging with this particular form.

Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* left an incising, incredible impact on my thoughts regarding the form. What's more, I think a work of such merit is worthy of examination, especially as our collective scholarly unit begins to enlarge the scope of Islamic feminism, following suit from El Sadaawi's work last week. The work uses semiotic understanding of comics to communicate what is a stylistically charged visual cornucopia of the protagonist's childhood through the fluctuations of political power in mercurial Iran. What the book truly passes on is a didactic experience of heart, courage, bildungsroman, and above all (and this is a point that Satrapi herself in the preface declares she sought to do) manages to humanize the people of Iran and

manages to nuzzle the gaping jaws of ignorance. The work makes use of several literary-visual devices to throne itself as an emphatic, surprisingly moving yet humorous work. Satrapi finds the obscurity and confusion in happy circumstances and manages to find the satire and bemusing oddities in macabre, regime-fuelled skirmishes and confrontations her liberal parents often are forced to have with the Islamic Republic's zealous police force.

The comic form permits for a simultaneous relationship between narrative and text to take place. Whilst our eyes naturally scan the narrative in the "hard" block overhead, there is a functional union of speech and narrative that seem more ordered in ordinary, conventional literature.

The marriage of visuals, narrative voice, and simultaneous speech provides for a liminal, cinematic experience. These cinematic liberations permit the protagonist, Marjane, to seamlessly switch between the story of her *own* life and juxtapose it with the similarly hectic, chaotic fate of Iran throughout the twentieth century. As a reader, it doesn't feel disarming or distracting to engross oneself in this -- in opposition, it actually comes across as being a more fluid stream of consciousness. While this may be an uncanny juxtaposition, I felt this was reminiscent of the work of Ta-Nehisi Coates and James Baldwin -- *Between The World and Me* and *The Fire Next Time* feature trains of thought that naturally find other paths to pursue. That being said, all three of the glorious triumvirate of works as a response to political times manage to tie and *justify* their decisions to be tangential. This is certainly a skill I'd like to learn as a budding writer -- the capacity to embark on a miniscule lesson or dialectic in my work (perhaps notably narrative non-fiction) without compromising the principal charm of my original point.

Design-wise, Satrapi's art choice is inconsistent and incongruous. And this is exactly why it launches into an appealing, thought-provoking sense of abstraction. For this is the most intriguing point of all. I've noticed that Satrapi would go into painstaking detail in a lot of situations, or pose serious events as humorous situations, but do so making us cognizant of the fact that she actually did put scrupulous research in. For example, p.44 depicts the Shah walking through a line of potential prime ministers, ranking them akin to how a girl would to her potential suitors. He dishes out immature remarks along the lines of "too short" "too tall" "an eyepatch" (for a man with one eye), and of course this isn't how the Shah actually assessed his candidates, but Satrapi manages to facilitate historical understanding in a relatable way.

Yet, when the author elects to delve into darker events, including massacres and crimes, there is heavy use of abstract, timeless, imagery, bereft of location. In this sense, it diffuses an otherworldly sentiment -- are we transported to a historical event, or is this merely how Satrapi sees it in her adolescent mind? Take p.59, when the dashing Uncle Anoosh documents his biography. He discusses how badly he missed his "brothers, parents, country..." while exiled in political turmoil, and instead of depicting a yearning, agonized expression, there is an image of faces swirling away nebulously, much like planets in the celestial order. The background is a stark shade of black, and suddenly we seem to be withdrawn from the harsh, austere reality that Satrapi had to get accustomed to, and that too as a woman. In her conversations with God following news that Anoosh has been executed, we regress back to this dreamlike sequence. Permeating one's mind using the graphic novel format is difficult -- there is no method like writing in italics in normal prose. In a wonderful combination of visuals, literature, and narrative, Satrapi not only regales us with a glorious recounting of the vacillating world she lived in, but

singlehandedly propels the coveted, erstwhile one-dimensional medium of graphic novel to meteoric heights known to only (at the time of publication) Art Spiegel's *Maus* (Though Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* is arguably the most popular non-superhero graphic novel out there today).

“Freedom had a price...” Satrapi muses, as her frustrations with her country are drowned and imbibed by the bittersweet melancholy of starting anew in Paris. We are left crushed but optimistic, saddened but contemplative at the news that her grandmother has passed. As someone who has been fortunate enough to move cities on four different occasions including New York, I too am not estranged from the tragic sentiments of emigration. A part of you will always be there, in the flesh of the land or in the imprint on others' hearts.

BOOK 10: "PATIENCE STONE", ATIQ RAHIMI

As I came to the conclusion of the fabulous *The Patience Stone*, I was naturally drawn towards a visual complement to what I considered to be an eloquent, bittersweet and graceful work. The book, which has accumulated awards with thunderous zeal for its quaint, poignant content, moved me to no traceable end. I wanted to, in magnifying this work, manage to emulate more of the fantastical elements that sumptuously adorn the rather saliently simplistic, but inherently complex, set of emotions. While encapsulating all the wondrous techniques Rahimi utilizes would take far too long, there are certain lessons that can and should be subsumed with a second helping.

I was particularly fond of Rahimi's choppy, descriptively potent prowess. In the passage which reads

" The fly sneaks into the heavy hush of the room. Lands on the man's forehead. Hesitant. Uncertain. Wanders over his wrinkles, licks his skin. No taste. Definitely no taste. The fly makes its way down into the corner of his eye. Still hesitant. Still uncertain. It tastes the white of the eye, then moves off. It isn't chased away. It resumes its journey, getting lost in the beard, climbing the nose. Takes flight. Explores the body. Returns. Settles once more on the face. Clammers onto the tube stuffed into the half-open mouth. Licks it, moves right along it to the edge of the lips. No spit. No taste. The fly continues, enters the mouth. And is engulfed. "

I was brazenly confounded by the unabashedly cinematic, palpitating description of one singular episode. I had, in erstwhile literary response discussions, harkened to Barbara Kingsolver's capacity to "extend a moment" using infinitesimal techniques, and I find that

Rahimi is extrapolating from that prestigious skill-set; his staccato'd words are soluble in the whirlpool of the marriage of analysis and description. Electing to scope in on a mere mundane fly's routine may be a facile task for many. But for Rahimi, it is a blatant opportunity to challenge himself *restrictively*. As one may be quick to deduce, word economy and efficiency isn't always the highest writerly priority on my list, as I aim to beautify, embellish and bedazzle any piece of writing I plunge into.

The most harrowingly tragic transpiration of the entire piece is its running motif of talking to a comatose figure. What gives way, dramatically speaking, is room for what are essentially monologues. It posits the following quandary: is the protagonist, our heroine, solely intent on conversing with her husband, or is he simply a vegetative foil for the audience? A litany of works which unfortunately include similar premises — take *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (allegedly completely orchestrated by the eye movements of a paralyzed patient) or, to a less austere extent, *The English Patient* (wherein a downed, severely charred patient recounts a symposium of past memories) manage to spur on heartfelt confessions and discussions. It's almost as if one has to be on the precipice of death to extract the most profound truths in life from the *other* person, flanking them by his or her bedside— confessing secrets, crimes and sinister deeds to someone who is virtually on their deathbed seems more consummating. In the *Patience Stone*, the husband's vegetative, injured and ailing state is not simply a means for his wife to reveal the intricacy of her life, but also a literary device that diffuses some of the most difficult situations. Some of the most significant confessions and pleas only arrive when one is about to slip away.

I don't often turn to the quizzical world of rap to land on quotes that best provide a summative cushion, but the eccentric Kanye West did have one utterance that I always cherished on his ode to another rapping titan:

“So if you admire somebody/ go ahead and tell them/people never get the flowers while they can still smell ‘Em.”

I seek to definitely entrench some of Rahimi's techniques in future endeavors, regardless of how initially difficult the subject matter may be. I shall certainly keep a look out for the film depiction in due course.

BOOK 11: "NIGHT", ELIE WIESEL

Where to begin in dissecting the most harrowingly visceral of works. Perhaps no other work I have read is tantamount to the sheer terror and uncertainty as Wiesel's masterpiece. I must admit that diving into the trenchant autobiographical account of the horrors that placated themselves onto the Jewish people during the monstrous, avaricious attempted Nazi conquest of much of Europe. The work seems to blur the delineations between novelistic tendencies and creative nonfiction -- this is to say that Wiesel's effective, sequestered paragraph style transforms the story into more sizeable, and, in some instances, easier to masticate chunks. And I say they are easier to accept and read only because many of the events that transpire encompass fright beyond belief. I do believe that's often what happens when writing about mordantly traumatic or excessively frightful events that have consumed you at one point in life: One tends to make them more abstract. I've found this to be true in other literature compositions based off war, for example: in erstwhile classes, we've been privy to the travails and tribulations of soldiers in Brian Turner's *My Life As a Foreign Country* and Tim O'Brien's celebrated *The Things They Carried*. It is perhaps worth mentioning that true horror can't simply be encapsulated by words. A combination of a willingness to capture accurate emotion and perhaps a shadowed reluctance to visit those aforementioned moments often result in something even more tantalizingly wondrous or beautiful (in its depiction, not in its content whatsoever of course).

Another vein that I was intrigued with was the constant oscillations in theme. One said theme that was continuously regressed to, perhaps as a consequence of the importance of religion in Judaism and the elevation of faith through arduous times, was the presence of God and the

narrator's relationship to it. Most importantly, it concludes in a crestfallen, defeated sense: that even the Almighty, the ultimate savior of your religion, remains powerless. I was deeply invested in these trains of thought not because I am a pious person, but solely because I've always wondered what religious, as opposed to political/cultural, responses to the dreadful Holocaust were, and Wiesel seems to shed some light on that. On page 93, he writes

“...slaughtered, gassed, and burned, what do they do? They pray before You! They praise Your name! "All of creation bears witness to the Greatness of God!" In days gone by, Rosh Hashanah had dominated my life. I knew that my sins grieved the Almighty and so I pleaded for forgiveness. In those days, I fully believed that the salvation of the world depended on every one of my deeds, on every one of my prayers. But now, I no longer pleaded for anything. I was no longer able to lament. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes had opened and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man. Without love or mercy. I was nothing but ashes now, but I felt myself to be stronger than this Almighty to whom my life had been bound for so long. In the midst of these men assembled for prayer, I felt like an observer, a stranger. The service ended with Kaddish. Each of us recited Kaddish for his parents, for his children, and for himself. We remained standing in the Appelplatz for a long time, unable to detach ourselves from this surreal moment. Then came the time to go to sleep, and slowly the inmates returned to their blocks. I thought I heard them wishing each other a Happy New Year! I ran to look for my father. At the same time I was afraid of having to wish him a happy year in which I no longer believed.”

While my knowledge of Holocaust era is somewhat limited, we find the reader at the heartbreaking moment of spiritual surrender. The reality that environs him is questionable-- can these atrocities be real? And what is there to account for the minuscule shred of happiness-- like the muted cries of Happy New Year -- in such an awful, macabre setting? In a rare admission, the author talks about how God in absentia emboldens him to stand on his own two feet and accept to spin the tremors of immeasurable fear and do what perhaps is the only option left to do in such incarcerated circumstances: turn it into formidable strength. In the works of Baldwin

specifically, we also hear of principal characters relying on their faith to see them through the downsides of advantage. However, when relying on pure faith and spirituality doesn't prevail or seem to produce any sort of respite from the horrors that humanity has spun unto its fragile self, often we see the protagonist begin to *question*.

This mentality sort of altered my worldview in a manner. Bobst Library was the fitting scholarly setting for my starting Daniel Defoe's renowned *Robinson Crusoe*, which examines the trope of a man being stuck on an island. How industrious is he? He can pray all he likes, but will God build him a raft? Did rationality save him, or did piety? They are not, after all, mutually exclusive. I'm not dismissing the transmogrific potential of religion and faith: they are vastly powerful tools and know no limits, as history for better and worse has revealed. Yet, what I *do* want to scope on is: when are the barriers of belief broken down? Does the endurance of agonizing hardship bolster religious subscribers, or shake them to their foundations? There is no clear-set, concise answer. Yet Wiesel's experience manages to set a foundation as a brave, courageous admission that *No--* I did *not*, in fact, feel that God adhered by me through this abhorrent series of events.

Night's supremacy in form, visceral reimagining of a horrible event within the author's life, and (realistic) audacity in questioning God fittingly sees it throned as a work of nonfiction suitable for generations ahead. It is through the most tumultuous and vile of events described that I wish more than ever for inter-religious, political and social peace.

BOOK 12: "CUTTING FOR STONE", ABRAHAM VERGHESE

The eminent, esteemed and graceful President Emeritus Obama mentioned a number of books in his 2011 annual Summer reading list. One in particular caught my attention, even then -- a bountiful, indefatigable novel about the trials and tribulations of estrangement and the subtle unforgettable bond that lies beneath. Abraham Varghese's *Cutting For Stone* is a medically charged masterpiece of both physiological and emotional cognizance; the fusion of the two is few and far between. The novel combines elements of the mysticism of human rationality and effortlessly strings it together with the concretized, hard-hitting, and at times moderately graphic scenarios of medical procedures. Furthermore, I enjoy how Varghese elects to combine his novelistic, fictional series of events with the *roman a clef* qualities of non-fictional, actual historical events within Ethiopia, notably the reign of Haile Selassi. I had previously heard of the eminent, fabled "Last Emperor" of the modern world through the bibliophilic, inexhaustible, pioneering work that Ryszard Kapuscinski wrote: his narrative series in the days leading up to Selassi's death are retrospectively perceived as being one of the founding origins in creative non-fiction, a genre that, in congruence with my writerly aspirations, I seek to one day excel within.

Cutting For Stone's voice is extremely compelling, as it leads us along the course of a heterogeneous nation that isn't quite sure of its identity within the confines of the "developing world", a term that is only ever permissibly issued by the pinnacles of Western idealism. I found Varghese's protagonists' monologue regarding how to remain at one with a culture particularly

endearing, bittersweet, and touching, given how my own family's identity has been forged by various multinational angles. The passage, which is as follows:

“if you want a sheep slaughtered in Brooklyn, call Yohannes, and in Boston try the Queen of Sheba's. In my years away from my birth land, living in America, I will see how Ethiopians are invisible to others, yet so visible to me. Through them I will easily find other recordings of “Tizita.” They are eager to share, to thrust that song in my hands, as if only “Tizita” explains the strange inertia that overcomes them; it explains how they were brilliant at home, the Jackson 5, the Temptations, and “Tizita” on their lips, a perfect Afro on their heads, bell-bottoms swishing above Double-O-Seven boots, and then the first foothold in America—behind the counter of a 7-Eleven, or breathing carbon monoxide fumes in a Kinney underground parking lot, or behind the counter of an airport newsstand or Marriott gift shop—has turned out to be a cement foot plant, a haven that they are fearful of leaving lest they suffer a fate worse than invisibility, namely extinction.”

chronicles how the protagonist, Marion Stone, manages to entrench and embed the cultural nostalgia that percolates in this surreal, fleeting, moving moment. The song in question, named *Tizita*, is an endearing, everlasting reminder of the country that, towards the latter stages of the work, Stone ends up leaving. Marion then, in a divagation from the narrative, takes us on a dry, apathetic tour of the innards of unspoken, uncelebrated quintessential tokens of capitalism's detritus: 7-Eleven, parking lots, airport newsstands” -- how Ethiopians, amongst other immigrant communities, have seamlessly transferred their lives to America, but not without the hindrances and long-working hours; assuming the laborious, tenuous functional jobs that others try and eschew. But this paragraph is simply beautiful: To paraphrase, it is saying, if you ever yearn for a slice of your homeland, if there is ever a desire for one's homeland that manifests, if there is ever a temptation to plunge back into the shrouded echelons of your life back home, then here -- this song will be with you. And if it doesn't suffice, here is a mandate for where and how to see your compatriots, as they are in the fibre of a nascent country far younger than the cradle of humanity

that you left for ripe opportunities. They may be invisible to others, relegated to being an immigrant laborer, but to you, there is an eye-locked, laconic bond that immediately connects you all. This excerpt of Varghese's is written with tantamount literary gravitas within the "art of goodbyes" as John Updike's famous *New Yorker* piece on Ted Williams' last game (October 22, 1960 Issue):

"The Sox won, 5-4. On the car radio as I drove home I heard that Williams had decided not to accompany the team to New York. So he knew how to do even that, the hardest thing. Quit. ♦"

As someone who has been immensely privileged to reap the benefits of the opportunities bestowed to me, I look around a city as deeply cosmopolitan as New York, and understand this "imaginary homeland" mentality, as Salman Rushdie famously uttered. Though an American schooled, British citizen with Swiss and Emirate seasoning, my family initially hails from India. Peoples of the subcontinent --Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Indian -- often wrongly and frivolously fight one another based purely on political differences, turning an austere blind eye to the fact that we are all derived from the same hallowed earth. Yet, when I encounter people from those nations, with my clipped, cosmetological American accent and deceptively fair skin, in New York, there is a cordial bond that effervesces quite quickly. They work long hours, and do so to bolster the opportunities of forthcoming generations, but never repudiate themselves from what best reminds them of familiar linguistic surroundings. While not revered for doing so, these kindhearted, friendly, and honest immigrant workers from all nationalities, backgrounds, religious systems and creeds manage to (to borrow a semiotic term) "Switch codes" effortlessly between their kin at home and the millions of souls they meet in the New World.

What is composite of one's identity? Is it for us to choose? These are some querulous questions I quarrel with sporadically as I breathe the crisp, darker New York air. As Stone traverses to the New World to symbolically complete what ends up being a *circuitous* journey- *back* to his estranged father, the subtext of heartfelt, sacrificial journeys comes into play. *Persepolis*, *The Poisonwood Bible*, and *Americanah* are all tales of what you leave behind counterbalanced with what you come across in your new "code-switched" self. Every triumphant footstep as one gets off the plane in New York, eager to start a new life, is spectrally incised by the loss of another world. As Satrapi says at the closing of her magnificent, palpitating journey *Persepolis*:
"Freedom had a price."

BOOK 13: *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*, MARK TWAIN

Throughout my writerly existence, I've had the pleasure of leeching life out of quite a few great works. One novel that many claim to be the greatest story is the ingenious Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The work dwells on many topics, including but not limited to coming of age, adventure, adversity, prejudice, racial bias, and the nascent American identity. At the turn of the century, as the nation is hurtling towards the possibility of another World War and on the long-term trajectory to be the leader of the free, Western world, *Huckleberry Finn* provides a novelistic sense of identity for America. In today's world, which seems more fractured and divisive than ever, it's important to magnify communities outside of my urban scope, regardless of whether I agree with them or not. I believe one family that is somewhat emblematic of pendulous division are the Grangerfords.

We've learnt and accepted that the protagonist doesn't really have a family to take comfort in. The haphazard, drunken antics of Huck's father, Pap, are not suitable for raising a child, and one could posit that it is due to the deficiency of a fatherly figure that Huck has developed into a rebellious chap. However, suppose Huck were to integrate himself into a familial structure of some sort, albeit briefly-would he react explosively? tranquilly? Would doing so simply upset him? This prospect is a reality in chapters 17 and 18. Huck finds himself immersed in a radically different lifestyle than the one he is familiar with, and the Grangerfords' influence is exercised through their environment, feud with the Shepherdsons, and Buck; the one figure whom subtly shares commonalities with Huck.

Huck isn't shy to heap praise upon the Grangerfords. They seem to be the preeminent model of a family, and their house is a lavish, antique haven. It's quite enlightening to learn how Huck notices and appreciates forms of beauty..."I hadn't seen no house...was so nice and had so much style" (Twain 158). Huck proceeds to give inchperfect, detailed descriptions of his alien surroundings, astonished by the sheer abundance of it all. A growing child who's often had to rely upon a stomach devoid of food, Huck just can't get enough of the gastronomic superiority on offer ("And warn't the cooking good, just bushels of it too!" (Twain 163)). Our hero soon begins to lionize the clan members themselves, attributing them with glorious appearances. He describes the Colonel as a man of both fragility and force..."Sometimes he smiled...when he straightened himself up...you wanted to climb a tree..." (Twain 164)), Bob and Tom as "Tall, beautiful men" (Twain 165), the enamored Sophia as "gentle and sweet, like a dove..." (Twain 165). To be frank, Huck is hypnotised by the nearperfection the Grangerfords achieve. Their welcoming attitude and surplus of necessities suck Huck into a vortex of utopia. Huck does his best to try and apprehend the seemingly nonsensical concept of a "feud", and, judging from Buck's reply (Buck can't even thoroughly explain how it began), the feud seems to be unjustified. We readers are amused by the observation that the two rivalling families attend church together, and attend sermons regarding "brotherly love" (169) despite having firearms within arm's reach. As if the situation wasn't volatile enough, Sophia, enamored with one of the Shepherdson boys, flees with her spouse, and this motion triggers a shootout. One would think that Huck, the adventurous vagabond, would relish a battle of this sort. Alas, he is mortified by the violence that ensues. He states that "I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night...I ain't ever going to get shut of them". (Twain 175). It isn't in Huck's nature for this to come out of his

mouth. Isn't this the very same boy whom glorified the adrenalin brimmed prospect of conducting murders and robberies as a member of Tom Sawyer's gang? The same chap whom had the nerve and composure to fake his own death? The reflection on the feud reminds us that Huck is still a boy, and although he could spend all day fantasizing about gory ventures, he's still much too young to grapple with death while remaining emotionless. The sole character whom Huck can relate to is the coincidentally named Buck, a young adolescent member of the Grangerford kin. Buck, like Huck, has a penchant for danger, electing to fire a shot at Harney Shepherdson (Twain 166) whenever possible. Buck adheres to the intrinsic feud, and acts as if he has no jurisdiction over whether he should enforce the feud or not-he simply has to. Consequently, following the shootout catalysed by Sophia's love-driven decision, we find that Buck can't comprehend death without painstaking sadness, although (like Huck) he straps on the façade of a daring, gun yielding chap "Buck begun to cry..." (Twain 174). Perhaps Buck can be construed as a character that is deliberately placed by Twain as another dimension of Huck. Buck is the wealthy Huck, the Huck that chooses to dedicate himself to a cause and abide by familial laws, no matter what. Huck is the rebel without a cause, whereas Buck is the gun-toting with a cause he can't defect from. When Buck is in the woods in the midst of the risqué shootout, Huck realises that this is a scenario for a soldier, not a mere child driven by a cause he can't explain. The fact that such a ferocious feud exists between the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons endangers all involved--thus, it isn't such a stable environment to rear children in., The Grangerford way of life is symbolic of how a beautiful, well-nurtured, orderly clan can self-destruct for no good rhyme or reason. Huck's endearing behaviour towards the Grangerfords transforms into ugly fear of further conflict. The violence traumatises Huck; he gets a nasty dose of reality from the

shootout. His closest Grangerford pal, Buck, ultimately pays the price for Huck to understand the devastation caused by this feud. Though Huck can grok the tragedy of this episode, he's too young to grasp the injustice.

The Grangerfords seem to serve as a cautionary tale of a mercurial family left to their own devices -- how a simple idea can be moulded into something uglier. I'm fond of how Twain utilizes a set of characters to be a sort of emblem, and I look forward to applying this device to my own fictional compositions. Communicating mentalities through characters provides a raw, more visceral experience as opposed to a simple, uneventful anecdote. Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" similarly documents the plight of Kurtz, who is virtually unrecognizable at the end of the tale. He is someone who has suffered mordant delusions of grandeur rather than a state of imperially-imposed peace. The world is full of influences that can sway and torment us -- the human psyche is more fragile than it often seems.

ENDPOINT CCC

As this course's glorious chapter comes to an end, I am left with a litany of multi-faceted thoughts and revelations concerning not just my literary journey, but humanity in the face of adversity and the notion of the "other" that I briefly touched upon. While the timespan of the 20th century brought about staggering scientific discoveries, medical remedies, reduced inequality in a broad sense, and a more universal cognizance of what has gone wrong with this enormous experiment known as humanity, it also bestowed heartbreaking conflicts, two earth-shattering world wars, fearsome weapons without precedent, and ideological skirmishes *en masse*. Discovering about all the aforementioned purely from the prescribed books leads to a wholly thought-provoking, flabbergasting series of epiphanies and, above all, a tendency to connect works that otherwise may seem separated and disparate from each other. For, dear reader, that seems to be the first monumental trudge forward in connecting the scattered shards of *Pangaea's* people -- identifying rapports in our art. When we execute this, it is revealed that, to be tranquilly blunt, there is far more that unifies us than divide.

Many of the works I pleurably steamrolled through have a concurrent motif of *identity* within them. In Wiesel's seminal *Night*, we are viscerally taken on a masterfully composed account of a Holocaust plight in the smoky midst of World War II. In an abhorrent series of events, Wiesel and his family, and Jewish people, are decompressed from their humanity, and while they identify with the prowess of Judaism -- something to be proud of --- they are fraught with hororr as their existence is humanized and reduced to merely being an "other". In Satrapi's heart-achingly bittersweet *Persepolis*, our young heroine is trying to lead a normal, Western-influenced fantasy life but is ultimately led to existentially question her decisions while

the ravaging backdrop of Iran undergoes its own pious identity crisis. In an infinitesimal moment, the protagonist can suddenly feel like a pariah in their own land. The same mindset extends to Wiesel -- Savage Nazi overlords planned the Jewish people's demise, and they did so in many nations wherein an abundance of Jews lived and peacefully flourished. The notion of transforming into the "other" in your own land is an austere terrifying prospect.

In terms of inter-cultural juxtapositions, I feel I could write endlessly on the dichotomy between magical sorcery and medicinal prowess between Rahimi's fascinatingly otherworld *Patience Stone* and Abraham Verghese's *magnum opus* revolving around the sentimentally charged medical narrative within *Cutting For Stone*. The former takes a comatose patient, rooted in an extreme of adversity and conveys him as being a mythological device which shields his wife from the evils of the world. This is wondrously obtained by her repetitive devotions and confessions which he is privy to while she sits by his bedside. In the latter, which is a superbly threaded journey concerning estrangement, rivalry, and displacement, our protagonist, Marion Stone, is enveloped in a medically charged biography, wherein detailed procedures, ailments, predicaments and operations are excruciatingly talked about in length. Between the poor medical provisions in his native Ethiopia and the world-class amenities present in the United States -- his proximate home -- there is no room vacant for magic in the book. It brings us to a heavy query: what is one meant to have faith in? Deriving from my nascent quandaries and questions while reading about the harsh, diabolical enslaving of people originating from African countries on account of the New World and English Colonies within the United States, I always propelled a sense of curiosity about whether masterful compositions like Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* are written in the fervor of freedom and rebellion, or as a manner to cope and document that which environs them? It may be an intellectual combination of both, but as there

is never a definitive answer— for it is up to the readers' construing to realize the end product, and that is why the journey itself is personal.

As I declined on my desk, admiring the megapolis that I am environs by, I wondered what these works have really left in my life. It took me a few walks, labyrinthine thinking bouts, and several moments on reflection for an epiphany to truly effervesce. And then, as swift and smooth as a stray *sirocco* wind blazing through an arid desert, sprinkling it with some essence of life, it came to me gently amidst the stars of this instantly saturated innovation we call New York: all we really strive for is to identify some kind of beauty through the madness. To rise above the downside of advantage, the perils of adversity, the whirlpools of sadness -- *that* is what many novels ultimately leave lingering in our feeble, awestruck minds. From Verghese to El Sadaawi, from Satrapi to Twain, from Baldwin to Coates, from Llosa to Kingsolver, there is a glorious prevailing of *beauty*, even if it is at the expense of someone or something, a *Pyrrhic* victory is present.

I don't know exactly where my literary journey will go, but I shall keep these lessons close with me for as long as I live, through every sort of experience, be it quotidian or life changing. We are functional beings, in terms of survival and nourishment, but we should never disregard that Epicurean, centrifugal mentality of pleasure, beautification and nostalgia. For those are the tools that extend memories forever and transcend memories into immortal moments.

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