

Kancholay Touray

Professor Keefer

Major Twentieth Century Writers

21 May 2019

I ntroduction

Without a shadow of doubt, art has historically and present-day become known as a vehicle to inspire and improve the lives of many. With the desire to share the art of one's writing piece and style widespread with the world, authors can leave a triggering or moving impact on the human mind, heart, and body. Sometimes, the legacy of any author can be difficult to measure. It is scaled against the tenor of the underlying currents of society or the writing(s) in which the author intentionally decides to craft and feed to the world. In this case, the written works of identity politics serves an important purpose in the disciplinary sphere of race, gender, and oppression (or the intersectional components deemed marginalized in which an individual identifies with). The experimental stories written by the authors in this essay, all of whom identify themselves and write about characters who are situated on the periphery due to the color of their skin and/or the genetic differences in sex chromosomes, are expressed to contest and shift the definition afforded to race, gender, and the boundaries of literature and literary freedom. The aim of this paper is to inquire into a critical area of distinctive interest to me known as two out of the many isms that are prevalent today, racism and genderism. The relevancy of these major themes will also consider the implications and comparisons of cross cultural (racism and genderism) analysis of contemporary works.

Between the World and Me (Ta-Nehisi Coates)

Every now and then, an author emerges as one of the voices of a generation. Ta-Nehisi Coates, regularly probes racial issues in the cultural, social, and political context in his memoir, *Between the World and Me*. The piece is written in epistolary form and rooted in the reality of racism. Coates admires his people and writes to enlighten and protect them simultaneously. He admires his ancestral kin and his young son, to whom he instructs through this imagery and text. Most importantly, Coates dives into the monitoring of the Black male body and the connection to the spaces in which these Black men occupy. He illuminates a metamorphical description, “But all our phrasing-race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy-serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience...upon the body.” (10)

The racism that is operated by America is one that is evident and physical. The long-rooted, present, and visible epidemic of the Black male’s struggle of citizenship, corresponds to their bodies ultimately forced into the perpetually racialized systematic institution or prison. The metamorphical statement polarises a complex political spectrum of ideas and behaviour and presents them as binary alternatives. These alternatives are of delusional faith in the American Dream, or of honesty – accepting America’s racist history.

Coates’ process in choosing to recite racism and the Black male body time and time again depicts the personal relationship he has with the theme. Coates ability to utilize Black vernacular demonstrates the resistance to white supremacy and respectability politics. In addition to the diction used, he mentions the expressions: “You will have to man up” and “Anyone can make a baby, but it takes a man to be a father,” to demonstrate “the language of survival.” (66) Indeed,

there are revealed codes and messages of mutual understanding traversing within Black communities. Language is also used as an avenue of control through privileged meanings and neologisms. Throughout history, it has become one of the most stable means of asserting self-control in a potentially hostile or at best indifferent context. These mechanisms of self-control and personal freedom have the capacity to bond individuals together in concerted reality, and also distance oneself and one's group from others who are potentially harmful. As Coates journeys onward, his advocacy for informal education is just as important as any traditional and formal kind. Significantly, Coates desires to educate his people and instill in them self-love, also known as Black love, which he acquires through his experiences and the inspirational Black male figures (his father, Amiri Baraka, James Baldwin, etc) who have aided him in his own journey of self.

Coates is a Black intellect thought leader rightly advocating and uplifting the Black delegation. I see this through his book, interviews, and his lived and shared experiences. It was interesting to see the long form of writing to his son connecting to the long form of racial brutality upon Black and Brown people in our nation. Coates touches on a taboo subject that many Black people who walk on eggshells are afraid to do. Nonetheless, Coates contribution and bravery around the taboo has allowed for the unveiling of a deeply rooted concern within the hypocrisy of America.

The Fire Next Time (James Baldwin)

James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, is written into two parts: "*Down At The Cross: Letter From A Region In My Mind*" and "*My Dungeon Shook: Letter To My Nephew On The One*

Hundredth Anniversary Of The Emancipation.” As James Baldwin pens this novel, he does so politically and in epistolary form while writing to his young nephew to whom he refers to as little James. Exceptionally written, Baldwin frames this text at the intersection of literature and equality to expand on open expression in a racist democracy. In *My Dungeon Shook*, Baldwin talks to his nephew about the loathing expressions he will come to experience when the future comes. In this future, he will have to confront an American society that opposes him because of his Blackness. However, Baldwin’s message to his nephew is for him to simply thrive and understand the structures of society. The combination of his essays, that presumably represent reality best, and creative writing, which are associated with what we conceive of as art, seem to represent a larger project that is a work in progress. His work seems to be less dictated by genre, and more focused around a set of ideas. It is in this way that Baldwin enters the vernacular space — antagonizing his audiences by not staying in his “actual place” as if there is an “actual” or proper place. Baldwin’s vernacular style takes a variety of discourses into consideration and his sentence structure is, as a result, densely and thoroughly conceptualized. What is most striking, and beautiful, is his untiring use of provoking words and concepts such as the body, freedom, love, home, and spirituality. Baldwin is not afraid to claim ownership and articulate meanings of words that are powerful.

Baldwin indirectly details his message to a broader audience. By doing this, he hopes to attract the attention of others, who do not identify as Black, and who would ultimately come to empathize and potentially commit to the solidarity of Black people and their livelihood. Baldwin’s youthful days takes on the role of a religious instructor and his role to engage others through the word of the gospel. In later years to come, he would demonstrate a different spiritual

agenda. Like Coates, Baldwin dives into the concept of human agency within a racial framework. Both authors vehemently agree that the fabrication of America was calculated to be an unjust system towards the existence of Black people and their bodies. Additionally, Coates identifies his love of Black culture through the multitude of books and resources provided to him by his father. He would also grow to understand his love for women and the value of a traditional family household. Baldwin's youth would make him the father figure to his eight younger siblings. His sexual orientation as a gay man would also make his oppression higher than the average Black man. Nonetheless, as Coates and Baldwin demonstrate such differences, they were very much alike in their Black cultural pathologies. Both authors exude intellectual energy and do not necessarily provide solution-based perspectives but rather provide lessons to nurture and preserve Black people.

The Fire This Time (Jesmyn Ward)

Inspired by James Baldwin's "*The Fire Next Time*," *The Fire This Time*, written by Jesmyn Ward, is crafted into three parts: "Legacy," "Reckoning," and "Jubilee." Ward chooses to invite a number of Black scholars and essayists, sharing memoirs, poems, and essays, to contribute and furthering the confrontation of America's practices of racial injustices and how those practices appear and "haunt" Black lives today. Each piece is structured to talk about the sufferings of Black people in the context of the past, present, or future. The contributors of this text are living differently in their day-to-day lives, however, they vacariously live through one another as they share a mutual and devastating outrage. Additionally, there seems to be a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood among these writers. Admirably, and in her rights, Ward devotes

this text “To Trayvon Martin and the many other black men, women, and children who have died and been denied justice for these last four hundred years.” Like Baldwin and Coates, Ward gives all of the authors in her text a platform to unapologetically express their emotions of racism and the trauma in which Black people have become exposed to. All of the writers reflect and allude to racism’s virtual appearance in every institution in this nation (government, school, corporations, and the list goes on). All of the writer’s are hopeful and encouraging to Black people who live in “the atrocious state.” We are all needing “to know that someone else saw the myriad injustices of living while Black” in a white America.

Blacker Than Thou (Kevin Young)

“Blackness is the face in the mirror, a not-bad-looking one, that for no reason at all some people uglify or hate on or wish ill for, to, about.” (103)

Message To My Daughters (Edwidge Danticat)

“Some of us try to distance ourselves from this reality, thinking that because we are another type of “other”—immigrants, migrants, refugees—this is not our problem, nor one we can solve. But ultimately we realize the precarious nature of citizenship here: that we too are prey, and that those who have been in this country for generations—walking, living, loving in the same skin we’re in—they too can suddenly become refugees.” (211)

The two pieces above were extracted from Ward's *The Fire This Time* to highlight my Gambian-American colluding identities. Growing up Gambian-American, it seemed as if there was always this lack of acceptance from Black Americans. For the longest, it was never cool to be African because the narrative was that Africa was dark and scary. So many of the negative name-calling took place because no one wanted to be associated with being an African. All of it, the concepts, the stigmatized notion, are rooted in anti-blackness to which we know stems from the destruction of universal Blacks at the hands of European men. Little did I know, that while Black people opposed Africans or Blacks who were on the peripherals of society, Black people in the United States were suffering too. They dealt with the fact that they really did not have a place to return to during summers, or that their Haitian or South African brothers and sisters were rarely present in the forefront of Black marches and protests. I never understood it though. I think the revelation became more apparent when I would hear my father say to me in a broken dialect, "I don wan' to see no hatabeenous (Blacks) hea ihn dis houws" or "Don woahdi about thee kids that say bad name to you, because dey wan' to bring you down." My father rebuked our own native tongue at home and was eager to substitute it for the white man's vernacular. He thought that America's respectability politics would favor him. I was living in two worlds. As I grew older, I was able to immediately grasp a sense of wokeness simply because I understood the history of Blacks in the American diaspora. I understood their struggle and knew instantly that their struggle was my struggle too.

Rachel Kaadzal Ghansah, who writes the second piece entitled *The Weight* in Part 1: Legacy of Ward's book is about discovering the beautiful life of Baldwin. She journeys to France and visits his home. In her journey, she desperately wonders "what he ate from his

kitchen, who he loved, who stayed in his annex of his estate” (30). Ghansah yearned to learn about Baldwin because of the flashback she encounters. Additionally, her love for writing was the added bonus where she found a sort of kinship connection with Baldwin. She references him one too many times and seeks to “...understand the private black language...” that many of the writers we are introduced to also seek (31). Ghansah finds that the racial inequality of Blacks was written by Baldwin as his own platform to share and engage. One that is opposite of the platform in which Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and many other “civil rights” have demonstrated advocacy for Black people. Baldwin’s actions inspired Ghansah. In her journey to preserve Baldwin’s life, and in her discovery of Baldwin’s intellect, she closes the text and writes, “What Baldwin knew is that he left no heirs, he left spares, and that is why we carry him with us. So now when people ask me about James Baldwin, I tell them another truth: He is my brother, he ain’t heavy” (32). Ward’s ability to “gather new voices in one place, in a lasting, physical form, and provide a forum for those writers to dissent, to call to account, to witness, to reckon” is one that truly moved and inspired me to craft up my own writing:

My Brother’s Keeper

“He is my brother, he ain’t heavy.” Sometimes I forget to protect my brothers because I am so far away from the mindset that Ward, Baldwin, Coates, and Ghansah have. It’s important that I be in it for the long haul. Even if it ain’t happening to me. I understand that NOW is the time that I must come to their defense. Whether it be marching alongside them or donating money. Cuz at any point in time, a Gregory Bush or George Zimmerman can come to the conclusion

that you aren't supposed to be in a designated neighborhood (your own perhaps). And then what? May I be reminded that I am my brother's keeper. "He is my brother, he ain't heavy."

M

emoirs of a Woman Doctor (Nawal El Saadawi)

Memoirs of a Woman Doctor, written by feminist, writer, physician Nawal El Saadawi, demonstrates the discrimination women in Saadawi's native nation, Egypt, face while at work, home, and in the society. The text is written in Middle Eastern fiction, first-person point of view, and nearly thirty years ago. Saadawi takes a jab at writing with such prose, style, tone, imagery, and so forth, leaving her (feminist) readers amazed. Regarding this text, Saadawi introduces the illustration of a young girl growing up in a traditional Middle Eastern (Islamic) family and state also described as "...the hateful, constricted world of women..." (14). Not only did men perpetuate a hegemonic state, but women too were complicit in these normalised acts. As we travel with the narrative, also the young girl, we come to understand that she may be the sole person who does not give in to the demeaning and uncivil ways of the society. However, there are moments in her adolescence where she faces body issues as other normal teens do. When reaching womanhood, she becomes firm in her beliefs by asking "Why should I lower my eyes when they looked at me? I was the same as them, or better" (24). Her confidence and of course love for reading at an early age enabled her to pursue higher education and ultimately becoming "...a qualified doctor with an old mind" (48). Her occupation would promise a fulfilling opportunity that had never been shown or promised to her in her younger days. The men she

would come to date and/or marry after acquiring much success, would demonstrate the ongoing narrative that men lived by (men were priority).

Saadawi's writing calls for political social change. One can see Saadawi as an active social advocate thriving to convert the traditional patriarchal society into an open, non-oppressive, liberal society based on justice, freedom, and equality. She believes that women's oppression is the central factor for the backwardness of society in general and of women in particular. She openly promotes the idea that women need to rebel against traditionally derived values, and the social and political heritage oppressing them.

Like Coates, Saadawi too highlights the severity and complicit actions of members in a society. Coates discusses the beatings in which many Black children received from their parents if they did wrong. This form of discipline was enacted so that Black children could learn not to step out of their 'racial boundaries' and to avoid facing larger consequences (lynching/beatings) by a white person. Black elders were pushing forth the idea that white people had created in and for society. For Saadawi, her text describes the discipline that the young girl received by her mother when the young girl decided to feel rebellious and cut off her long hair. In this scene, the mother is perpetuating the concept that each gender must follow the rules of what it means to be male and female. Men must have beards, be strong, and assertive. Women must be pious, weak-minded, and have long hair. Both text concentrates on the theme of society and how it impacts lives.

The Patience Stone (Atiq Rahimi)

The Patience Stone, written by Atiq Rahimi, is a beautifully written prose approached by a nameless female protagonist (whose Afghan society might deem her as the antagonist). The main character musters up the courage to utilize her voice, one that has been silenced throughout her life because of her gender. In the narration, she shares concealed secrets to her coma ridden husband. The woman battles with internal degradation from the society to which she is born into. A society that promises men an elevated state of power while women bear domestic roles and attend to their men. Rahimi utilizes his male privilege to create an eye-opening text. Due to his maleness, he is able to craft up the reality of Afghan women in the society. I commend his ability to do what is noble and of course his exquisite writing style. However, I choose not to glorify his act because I then fall into the perpetuating state of glorifying men whose ideals do not align with my own. Additionally, when reading this text, I simply could not get into the notion that a man actually wrote this piece. This mainly had to do with my emotional affinity with the female protagonist in the book and understanding her physical and mental strain. Nonetheless, Rahimi adopted a very bold approach towards narration. His expressions were short and loud which stood out to me.

Similarly to the writings of Coates, Baldwin, Ward, & Saadawi, Rahimi too manages to dissect the struggles of marginalised groups. Groups of people who society has claimed are not your typical humans. Therefore, they become invisible and get treated as such. Unfortunately, there is a soaring number of traumas that goes unhealed. The Black and Middle Eastern characters whose images and voices appear in our minds are rampant. These characters, despite their burdens imposed by society, are innovators who seek to climb and escape the injustices they face.

In all areas of the world, women are the least appreciated. In Gambia, my parents native hometown, where an infusion of religion and culture meets, women are slowly coming out of their secondary positions as citizens. An added element that adds to the complexity however is colorism. Men (sometimes families) choose their young women to marry based on skin tone. Despite choosing her for the color of her skin, and if she has no formal education, she is still belittled and expected to do her womanly duties. Women who reside in nation states with laws deeming them as secondary to men, are the heroes to whom I stand in solidarity with.

Americanah (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)

Americanah, written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, illuminates the unique experience of two Nigerians emigrating and their encounters with confining social categories. Adichie's writing connects well with the writings of both the Black and Middle Eastern writers to which we have been exposed to thus far. Like Coates and Baldwin, Black identity is an important aspect of one's self especially when residing in the "Land of the Free." Ifemelu feels this when she notices the White spaces in which she enters are toxic because they weigh her down (specifically when others use certain words and language to patronize her). Like Saadawi and Rahimi, Adichie too shares her writing from the outside lens of America. Additionally, a western society, or the American dream, is idolized by everyone. Adichie's novel helps readers, whether black or white, American or non-American, to discover a side to the Nigerian (or immigrant) experience in America and racial issues that still exist today. Furthermore, Ifemelu's concept of blogging has been carefully threaded into the overall narrative structure, and it is used as an

outlet in order to share her experience of blackness and race in the US, which eventually results in self-discovery and a reshaping of her identity.

My personal journey at one point, was getting acquainted with my Africaness while also being Black. For me, there were different ways of imaging the same existence. In the novel, Adichie also refers to the terms American-Black and Non-American Black, and I immediately identified with both of them. I was floored by their sudden, wonderful intrusion into my personal vocabulary, it felt like putting names to two familiar, elusive faces rather. Similar to Ifemelu's experience, she too encounters racism and learns about America's race relations, experiences cross-cultural clashes, and encounters sexism in her friendships, relationships, and communities in her young womanhood. Her hair and accent, for instance, shifts from being a non-issue while growing up in Nigeria to becoming a heavy burden of her status as Black and African in the US. They must be changed in order to cope with America's expectations of Black women. However, in each case there is a significant moment when Ifemelu, after initially adopting these expectations, rejects these conformations and decides to speak in her Nigerian accent and cut her chemically-treated hair for a natural style. Like Ifemelu, I was groomed to believe that my hair needed chemical relaxers because it was deemed presentable by everyone (especially in my Gambian culture). It wasn't until I had pursue higher education where I really became in tune with my natural kinky roots and no longer had a desire to play into the respectability politics of straight hair.

Ifemelu's experiences at a predominately white institution of higher education, entering and residing in spaces of whiteness, observations of her cousin Dike's depression from encounters of racism at school alongside his mother's ignorant dismissal of these encounters, and

her relationships with white liberals such as Laura & Don, are significant contributors to her observation of race relations and racialized encounters amongst White Americans. Her experiences are rarely divorced from her own identity as Nigerian, or African. For instance, her growing disdain for her White American roommates is born of their denigrating demeanor towards her. In one situation, a jobless and struggling Ifemelu finds her carefully crafted sandwich subject to the hunger of her roommate's dog. Her roommate found this humorous and Ifemelu's distress for the consumption of her financially rationed food unbecoming, and when Ifemelu laments her roommate says, "You better not kill my dog with voodoo," (154) referring to her simplistic and ignorant Eurocentric imagination of Ifemelu's African culture as taboo. Again like Ifemelu, she is sort of in an enclosure because of her surrounding at a white institution. My experience here at NYU, especially when at the earlier stages of my experience, I struggled heavily because I constantly felt the need to reform my ways of being. This meant having to change my appearance, tailoring my speech, and simply following the patterns of my white counterpart just so that I could "fit in." From these spaces, deemed negative for Ifemelu at the current time, she has been able to find and gain the confidence and self-love needed in order to feel majestic at the end of her journey.

The Bluest Eye (Toni Morrison)

The Bluest Eye, written by Toni Morrison, explores the tragedy of oppression and internalized racism by imposing white American ideals of beauty on the developing female identity of a young African-American girl during the early 1940's. The novel poignantly shows the psychological devastation of Pecola Breedlove, who searches for love and acceptance in a

world that denies and devalues people of her own race. Pecola hopelessly longs to possess the conventional American standards of feminine beauty—namely, white skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes—as presented to her by the popular icons and traditions of white culture. Morrison's piece is closely linked to the many of the other texts we have covered thus far this semester.

Collectivity includes the dependence of individuals upon each other for the survival of the black community and Morrison realistically exposes the disappointments of the collectivity in her novel. The community reinforces the identities of its members through belief and heritage and individuals must remain a part of the collectivity in order to be innately complete. Like Coates, Baldwin, and Adichie, to whom all have identified as Black/African writers, *The Bluest Eye* discusses similar themes of race, gender, social justice, and identity. With the expatriate Baldwin traveling to France, Coates' experience in the states (and abroad), Adichie's cross-cultural highlights of the Nigerian experience to the Black US experience, Morrison would set a marvelous tone for the future African-American literature writers (especially for Adichie and Coates). The authors who are aforementioned are dedicated and hopeful in the perseverance and livelihood of African-American people.

Morrison's main character in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove, can be compared to Adichie's protagonist in *Americanah*, Ifemelu. Beauty is one element which defines the experience for the two dark-skinned female characters. Pecola Breedlove believes having blue eyes and lighter skin will change her life for the better and also lead her to become socially acceptable. Beauty standards are racially skewed and provide benefits only for lighter-skinned people. Eurocentrism promotes European culture as being the superior way to go, while dismissing other cultures. For example, tactics such as skin-whitening are unhealthy ways in

which woman in Ifemelu's native home base in Nigeria try to meet the high demands of beauty that has been placed. Both characters receive mixed messages about what's right and what's wrong and come to face certain struggles with their identity. Morrison's inclusion of these details is a common first novel decision and a way to incorporate real-life inquiries into her writing. Morrison's writing reflects that of someone who is determined to educate the reader on the problematic notion that only the privileged get to determine what goes into literature. Prior to diving into race and gender, she speaks on the term "quality," as a coded language, used by non-Blacks who would equate to the idea that only white men can be knowledge producers. African-Americans could not bring valuable analysis to the literary sphere. Morrison's way of thinking is brilliant because it challenges the reader to see how the Western hub or culture could produce its literature with a variety of identities, philosophies, and the learned ways of living within the scope of the United States.

Morrison's work is always an eye opening experience, causing one to think about themselves, others, and the world in a way other piece's of literature might fail to do. *The Bluest Eye* was a dark and honest depiction of how the American dream, or the standard rather, can put a massive strain on its people, those people of color and then additionally to those young people of color. Morrison brilliantly uses the introduction of the book to highlight excerpts from the historical elementary school reader many American children at the time grew up with, the Dick & Jane story, which tells us that the only proper family is the happy white mother and father, the blonde and blue-eyed siblings, the dog, car, house and let us not forget, the "white-picket" fence. Morrison's intent to include this piece in her art was in a way to ignite spark in the minds and hearts of everyone, both Blacks and Whites. Racism is also gendered due to the imposition of

integrative – toward White American norms – expectations of not only how one looks, but how one defines themselves. As the African saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child,” the village in Morrison’s text completely goes against the grain by their complicit actions of destructing Pecola’s livelihood and self-esteem. Pecola is not to blame nor is she delusional. The American society is to be held accountable for having such delusional expectations of it’s people.

The readings I have analyzed so far has enabled me to gather collective wisdom through painstaking comparisons and acknowledging the overlap that exists between them all. The authors to whom I have been reacquainted with and introduced to are quite parallel in their portrayal of such themes. While maintaining distinctive styles, these writers have successfully employed the motifs of freedom, dreams, symbolism and various poetic devices all in the name of art (and perhaps love). Their stories, written with several tones and mood shifts and a structure suited to their function, passionately describe the relevant themes of the world. In and through the remarkable methods of literature, I am empowered and hopeful in my growth for it.

On Being Brought From Africa to America (Phillis Wheatley)

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
 Taught my benighted soul to understand
 That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
 Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
 Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
 "Their colour is a diabolic die."
 Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,

May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

Phillis Wheatley's "*On Being Brought From Africa to America*," explores the psyche and identity of the young African American slave narrator who attempts to come to terms with her being torn from her native African soil and being forcibly relocated to colonial or White America. What is astonishing is that she is not complaining about her life as a slave because she says that as a result of being a slave in America, she is now become accustomed to religion and God. Wheatley throughout the poem tells about the change in her belief system and she also tells that it was only after coming to America that she realized how Africans were being treated outside their country. Additionally, the language in which she uses is very intentional. For example, Wheatley uses the word "benighted" as it relates to a state of darkness or overtaken by darkness. The term not only indicates the color of her skin but also to reflect the current slave status of her life. By using the phrase "mercy brought me" and by choosing to entitle this poem the way she did, she is showcasing the fact that she was kidnapped but at the same time, she also emphasizes the fact that she is also in the hands of mercy. She has related slave trade with mercy. Despite being positive about the fact that she is a slave she also reminds the readers the fact that Africans are not born to be enslaved; they possess equal rights as any other human being. Her ability to incorporate a black vernacular in the closing sentences of her poem to represent what most Black people in the south (especially during slavery time) symbolized is inspiring to see.

Double Dutch (Gregory Pardlo)

The girls turning double-dutch bob & weave like boxers pulling
 punches, shadowing each other, sparring across the slack cord
 casting parabolas in the air. They whip quick as an infant's pulse
 and the jumper, before she enters the winking, nods in time
 as if she has a notion to share, waiting her chance to speak. But she's
 anticipating the upbeat like a bandleader counting off
 the tune they are about to swing into. The jumper stair-steps into mid-air
 as if she's jumping rope in low-gravity, training for a lunar mission. Airborne a moment
 long enough to fit a second thought in, she looks caught in the mouth bones of a fish
 as she flutter-floats into motion like a figure in a stack of time-lapse photos
 thumbed alive. Once inside, the bells tied to her shoestrings rouse the gods
 who've lain in the dust since the Dutch acquired Manhattan. How she dances
 patterns like a dust-heavy bee retracing its travels in scale before the hive. How
 the whole stunning contraption of girl and rope slaps and scoops like a paddle boat.
 Her misted skin arranges the light with each adjustment and flex. Now heather-
 hued, now sheen, light listing on the fulcrum of a wrist and the bare jutted joints of elbow
 and knee, and the faceted surfaces of muscle, surfaces fracturing and reforming
 like a sun-tickled sleeve of running water. She makes jewelry of herself and garlands
 the ground with shadows.

Gregory Pardlo's, "*Double Dutch*," flows well with its imagery and long form. The poem describes little girls playing double dutch, or a jump rope game. Pardlo uses simile by comparing the girls turning the rope to a number of occupations and activities that generally comes with a variety of tasks. He also includes the act of a girl waiting for the right time to enter

which is also compared but this time to “...nods in time as if she has a notion to share, waiting her chance to speak...” This phrase is salient because of the nature in demonstrating how serious the girl is at the moment and how careful she is waiting for the right timing. The subjects in the simile are not so different at all; they both are serious decisions that need careful thinking. As a reader, I can almost hear the sounds of the rope hitting the ground, and the girl counting the beat and deciding when best to jump in. Only then the poem finally captures the “action” in the “moment” like Pardlo intended. His use of similes and metaphorical descriptions, captures the essence of the game perfectly.

On Being Brought from Africa to America & **D**ouble Dutch

Wheatley’s poem enabled me to think and grasp earnestly about intersectionality or the elements which includes one’s Africaness, Americanness, Blackness, and womanhood all drenched in one. Adichie’s *Americanah* is a prime example of a person’s shift in culture. The female protagonist, Ifemelu, is compelled to merge her various identities to find her path in America and ultimately finds the results she is looking for. Wheatley’s narrator also positively come to terms with being stripped from her homeland because she eventually finds herself through religion in America. Religion is also emphasized by a number of the authors we’ve encountered thus far especially the male authors such as Coates, Baldwin, and Rahimi. Even though Wheatley does not pose her poem to be symbolic of time, I think her poem covers this theme exceptionally especially when we see the narrator’s past, present, and future self. In comparison, Pardlo’s use of time is also brilliant. The underlying theme of time is the cycle of life or perhaps the rotation of the seasons (and of course it’s of the essence). Every move we take

in the seconds that we're living by, can take a detour of our lives. This is especially true for the female protagonists in the novels we've touched on.

Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe)

Chinua Achebe's "*Things Fall Apart*" depicts the unsolicited colonization of an Igbo (or Ibo) group based in Nigeria. The protagonist, Okonkwo, is deemed as the strong leader of the tribe called Umuofia. Okonkwo, unlike his "feminine" father, represents the ideal man of a Nigerian nation. Those (masculine) qualities include heroism, strength, and dignity. It seems as if Okonkwo's distaste for his father's qualities have appeared through Okonkwo's violent actions which portrays dominion and jurisdiction over his family (primarily his wives and children). Additionally, Okonkwo is forbidden to engage in a killing but disregards the message by taking it upon himself to kill Ikemefuna, who is like a son. The demonstration of killing here is linked to a deep-rooted internal fear of not adhering to the principles of masculinity and the flaws that are associated with masculinity.

The tribe in which Okonkwo and his family have escaped to for exile are met by a missionary group that ultimately convinces them that they have invested in the wrong God this entire time. A white man from the missionary asserts: "...that the true God lived on high and that all men when they died went before Him for judgment." This new concept and invasion upsets Okonkwo because members of his immediate family and fellow clansman have now accepted the white man's ideology of religion (and overall structure of the Umuofia society). The shift within missionary leadership does not change Okonkwo's attitude. He does not accept the fact that his son has become docile, like his own father, and the lack of resistance from his clansmen makes

the novel much more tragic because Okonkwo is alone in his desire to retaliate against the men who have come and ruined the way of life in Umuofia. In the end, readers witness a calamity, to which the self-made and respected leader, Okonkwo, has fatally killed himself in the name of power.

Things Fall Apart has many similarities to the books we have touched on thus far. For starters, like Atiq and Saadawi's vivid novels, Okonkwo's society is gendered. Women are classified as weak and people often feel and think "sorrow" when imaging matriarchy. In Atiq's writing, we don't hear from the sick husband but we understand that his traits and beliefs are similar to that of Okonkwo. Saadawi too shares the comparisons in which the protagonist's mother often made between the unnamed female and her brother from childhood. Comparison's are also made in *Things Fall Apart* when the elder shares the difference between fatherhood (as sovereign) and motherhood (as misery). Adichie's *Americanah*, also demonstrates a parallel structure to Achebe's piece. Adichie and Achebe respectively, both West African writers, discuss the downfalls of both western (and sometimes African) culture. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe does not fail to criticize the missionaries, or the western culture perhaps, as bluntly as possible. Contrastly, in Adichie's piece, she attempts to conceal her truth a bit. Most of the criticism in *Americanah* is found in between the main plot. Whether that is the introduction of characters like Kimberly or whether it is the blog posts that Ifemelu writes about, Adichie finds unique ways to portray how she sees both American and Nigerian cultures. Both authors are aware of the infrastructures of both cultures and are able to write about them in an open and brave manner.

Okonkwo



This image symbolizes many things. The trunk of the tree represents the mighty Okonkwo, who is the main support and protagonist attempting to give shape and strength to his people. The crown of the tree is naked with no leaves representing the people of the Imuofia tribe. The background which gives off a modernistic scenery, exemplifies the shift in culture (perhaps for the better one might even question). Essentially, as the trunk of the tree grows in height, it becomes slender and lifeless like Okonkwo's life at the end of the novel.

The Native Son (Richard Wright)

Richard Wright's "*The Native Son*," was written based on the few experiences in which Wright himself encountered during the mid-1900's. Wright uses historical racism structured in the United States to depict the harsh realities in which Blacks faced and to which few white Americans were oblivious to. The text comprises of many characters but the main character to whom we encounter is Bigger Thomas. Bigger is identified as a young African-American male living in the urban sphere of Chicago. He is upset with white society because of the inherent bias

and prejudice that he and his people experience on a daily. As a result, he continues to conceal rage and frustration because it seems as if he is not able to find a solution to end the unjust “madness” that is happening. The climax occurs when Bigger unexpectedly murders his employers daughter Mary. Bigger is caught in a double bind because he understands that he must not cross racial boundaries (or interact) with whites and especially if they were white women. However, this task becomes tough when one is employed by whites and also lives in a system dominated by whites.

The racism that affects Bigger, has a deep impact in his way of thinking and behaving. Richard Wright states in the introduction of his novel, “...the ubiquitousness of Bigger: there were literally millions of him everywhere. White biggers abounded in response to the same fundamental environment that had helped sponsor, in situations that involved blacks, the secondary conditions that produced black Biggers” (Wright 10). Biggers were apparent and subjugated throughout the world as oppose to focusing solely in America. Most of them were restless and confined in their own states while looking to fit in everywhere they traveled. Parallel to Baldwin and Coates, each author focuses on the theme of racism in America and particularly the racism that surrounds men and boys of color. The ways in which African-American males must conceal and navigate a racialized white supremacist system becomes arduous and undefeatable. This is especially true when one examines the Department of Education (DOE) in New York City and other urban settings too. Young boys of color in the DOE are targeted often because of their skin tone, height, appearance, and their behaviors or ways of thinking. In connection to the additional texts read this semester, Achebe and Kingsolver’s pieces can be compared to that of Wright’s. Most marginalized nations were founded on imperialism and

exploitation (like Nigeria & Congo), and have created fearful and restless characters like Bigger & Okonkwo, who were both oppressed and Nathan Price, the oppressor. Mainly for Bigger & Okonkwo, both characters search for a place for themselves in a world that, for them, has lost many of its cultural and spiritual centers. Oppression seems to permeate every aspect of life for these male, African/Black characters.

The Poisonwood Bible (Barbara Kingsolver)

Barbara Kingsolver's "*The Poisonwood Bible*," is an epic fiction novel summed into different books like the bible. The text is also illustrated and narrated by the Price family. Nathan Price, a baptist minister who lures his wife, Orleanna Price, and his four daughters, Rachel, Leah & Adah, who are twins, and Ruth May on a voyage to partake in missionary affairs. The Price family, a traditional Southern Baptist American-White family, are uprooted by the dominant male figure in the family to start a new life in the republic of Congo, located in West Africa. The members of the Price family all encounter different experiences within their new culture.

Nathan Price is the first to acknowledge the reason behind the resistance of baptism from the Kilanga people. He gets entirely entrenched in preachings, or tactics rather, in order to convert Tata Ndu's village to an alternative religious belief. After the Price family is asked to leave the village, Nathan refuses because his devotion to saving lives religiously is all that he caters to. It isn't until the youngest daughter of the Price family, Ruth May, dies from a snake bite wound, where the rest of the female members of the Price family take action for themselves. Kingsolver gives very illuminating character traits to the Price family which makes the novel very unique.

The Poisonwood Bible, by Barbara Kingsolver, corresponds to the historical and (some might even say present-day) colonial subjugation of groups of people and their day-to-day happenings. The most dissatisfying part about this book was hearing about the white egotistical man who is deemed as superior. For a long time, it has become normal to continuously hear about the vanguard, the white group of men who continue to be the forerunners in politics, c-suite leadership, and so forth. While the novel put a distaste in my mouth due to attempts of imperialism by Nathan Price, I will say that I was intrigued to hear from the voices of the five female characters. All of these women varied and encompass a full range of personalities. The inequality of women is a prominent theme to the overlying one on cultural acceptance, but hearing from these women gives (female) readers joy, understanding and perhaps hope.

Kingsolver's piece resonates to Achebe's piece in many ways. Both texts elaborate on the colonial imperialism of West African countries by Eurocentric/Western ideologies and white men. Religion is a prime theme that links the two novels. The Kilanga and Umuofia tribes are deemed not worthy and incompetent (religiously). Therefore, new western ideas must be projected and practised by the societies in order for them to meet God and gain their ticket to the "right" heaven. Kingsolver and Achebe are ideal in their language and bravery when bringing goodness to the African narrative.

I, Too (Langston Hughes)

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother / They send me to eat in the kitchen / When company comes,
But I laugh / And eat well / And grow strong.

Tomorrow / I'll be at the table / When company comes / Nobody 'll dare / Say to me /
 "Eat in the kitchen," / Then.
 Besides, / They'll see how beautiful I am / And be ashamed—
 I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes writes, *I, Too* in extended metaphor, free verse, and precise repetition at the start and in the end of his poem. He crafts this long yet brief speech to narrate the injustices faced by Black Americans but also the hope that they too will gain better treatment. The narrator, to whom readers identify as Hughes himself, is not permitted equality such as the Whites in America are. However, he highlights how he is still an individual living in America. As the poem focuses on a deep and concerning issue—racism—Hughes truly envisions a positive change. The action of change will come from both the narrator, who will refuse to return to the kitchen as if he is a house slave, and the whites, who treat him as if he does not a right to be treated rightly.

Coping (Audre Lorde)

It has rained for five days
 Running
 the world is a round puddle of sunless water
 Where small islands are only beginning to cope
 a young boy in my garden
 is bailing out water from his flower patch
 when I ask him why he tells me
 young seeds that have not seen sun

forget and drown easily

Audre Lorde demonstrates a stream of consciousness technique in her poem, *coping*. The continuous flow of thoughts in her mind is shared through personification of grief and vividness. In Lorde's poem, the narrator introduces rain as a form of isolation or state of despair for such a long period of time (or five days). As the rain continues, the narrator sees his or her entire world filled with sunless water which represents a lonely world. Then, Lorde talks about the form of coping by mentioning small islands to which some readers might connect to beauty and sunsets. Lorde's emotional piece deals with conflict and the way in which individuals confront and handle loss, pain, and their own suffering.

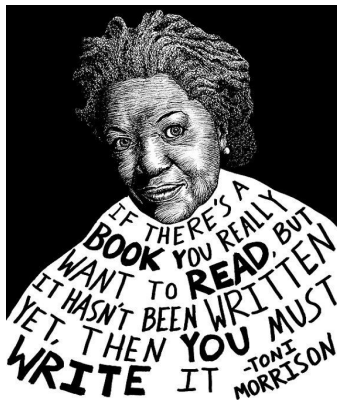
I, too & Coping

Hughes & Lorde, African-American activists, writers, and poets hailing from my hometown New York City, are very intentional in the way they choose to craft their writing. Written freely and in few stanzas, both poems enabled me to digest what it means to be Black in America and also dealing with isolation. Each short poem is incredibly personal to the authors which might be one reason as to why they decide to structure their pieces in a way where the audience would get attached. The boy character in Lorde's poem, who I would imagine to be a young black African-American boy based on Lorde's outside writings, could potentially have grown to be the Black man in Hughes' poem. As readers, we aren't exactly equipped with enough material to understand how Hughes main character dealt emotionally prior to becoming a man. I would imagine that as a young child, we don't necessary know how to deal with emotions

of despair until we've reached manhood. The young boy in Lorde's poem and the black man in Hughes' poem seem to both relate to the main character, Bigger Thomas, in Wright's *The Native Son*. All three characters suffer or have suffered at one point in time. However, they eventually find or will find mechanisms that'll support their emotions and well-being in the lonely or marginalized states to which they are caught in.

Epilogue

The readings analyzed throughout this semester has enabled me to gather collective wisdom through painstaking comparisons and acknowledging the overlap that exists between them all. The authors to whom I have been reacquainted with and introduced to are quite parallel in their portrayal of such themes relating to the isms of race, sex, and gender. While maintaining distinctive styles, these writers have successfully employed the motifs of freedom, dreams, symbolism and various poetic devices all in the name of art (and perhaps love). Their stories, written with several tones and mood shifts and a structure suited to their function, passionately describe the relevant themes of the world. In and through the remarkable methods of literature, I am empowered and hopeful in my growth for it.



Bibliography

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann, 1958.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, *Americanah*. New York, New York: Anchor Books, A Division of Random House LLC, 2014. Print.

Baldwin, James, 1924-1987. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Dial Press, 1963. Print.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. First Edition. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes. I, Too*. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1994. Print.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005. Print.

Lorde, Audre. *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde. Coping*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. Print.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Plume Book, 1994. Print.

Pardlo, Gregory. *Double Dutch* from *Totem*, published by The American Poetry Review.

Rahimi, Atiq. *The Patience Stone*. Vintage, 2011.

Sadaawi, Nawal El. *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989. Print.

Ward, Jesmyn. *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race*. First Scribner Hardcover Edition. New York: Scribner, 2016. Print.

Wheatley, Phillis. *On Being Brought From Africa to America*. *Gleeditions*, 17 Apr. 2011.

Wright, Richard, 1908-1960. *Native Son*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. Print.