



SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI COLLEGE

(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University)

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Tiruchirappalli - 620 002

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL
FOR
COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE
22ACCEN14



BY
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Third Year	CORE COURSE-XIV COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE Code: (Theory)	Semester-VI Credit:5
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OBJECTIVES:

- To appreciate literary works from various countries that were once under British colonial rule as a branch of English Literature in general.
- To recognize that 'Commonwealth Writing' has a global relevance, significance, and resonance
- To analyze and assess the postcolonial characteristics of Commonwealth literature.
- To realize translation studies' contribution to Commonwealth literature.
- To examine the importance of reading these texts in wake of globalization critically.

UNIT – I POETRY :

Mervyn Morris : Judas
Kamala Wijeratne : To a Student

UNIT – II POETRY :

Edwin Thumboo : Gods Can Die
E.J. Pratt : The Dying Eagle

UNIT – III PROSE :

Margaret Atwood : Nature as a Monster (from Chapter 2 Survival:
A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature)
George Lamming : "Introduction" from *The Pleasures of Exile*

UNIT – IV DRAMA:

Wole Soyinka : The Lion and the Jewel

UNIT – V FICTION:

Chinua Achebe : Things Fall Apart

UNIT - VI CURRENT CONTOURS (For Continuous Internal Assessment Only):

Present famous literary characters in different perspectives – Attempt critical analysis based on plot construction and portrayal of characters – Assess literary negotiations of colonization and decolonization, identity, inequality and marginalization – Investigate issues of cultural plurality and hybridity – Explore Ecological, Sociological and Psychological aspects related to the current scenario.

COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE

I. Answer the following:

1. Mervyn Morris' poem *Judas* presents an alternative perspective on the biblical character _____.
Answer: Judas
2. In *Judas*, the speaker reflects on themes of _____ and betrayal.
Answer: guilt
3. The poem *To a Student* by Kamala Wijeratne highlights the struggles and challenges faced by _____.
Answer: students
4. In the poem, the poet emphasizes the importance of _____ in overcoming difficulties.
Answer: perseverance
5. Kamala Wijeratne's *To a Student* conveys a message of _____ and encouragement.
Answer: motivation
6. Edwin Thumboo's poem *Gods Can Die* explores the themes of power, faith, and _____.
Answer: mortality
7. In *Gods Can Die*, the poet reflects on how beliefs and deities can fade due to changing _____.
Answer: times/societies
8. E.J. Pratt's poem *The Dying Eagle* symbolizes the decline of _____.
Answer: strength/power
9. In *The Dying Eagle*, the eagle represents resilience and _____ in the face of _____.
Answer: dignity
10. The poem highlights the conflict between nature and _____.
Answer: time/inevitability
11. In *Nature as a Monster*, Margaret Atwood explores the theme of nature as a force.
Answer: hostile
12. Atwood contrasts Canadian literature's depiction of nature with the more _____ views found in British and American traditions.
Answer: romanticized.

13. According to Atwood, Canadian literature often portrays nature as something to be _____ rather than conquered.

Answer: survived

14. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, George Lamming explores the experiences of _____ in a colonial and postcolonial context.

Answer: exile

15. Lamming's work examines the impact of colonialism on identity, culture, and _____.

Answer: literature

16. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the two main male characters competing for Sidi's hand are Lakunle and _____.

Answer: Baroka

17. Lakunle represents modernity and Western ideals, while Baroka symbolizes _____.

Answer: tradition

18. The play is set in the Yoruba village of _____.

Answer: Iluojinle

19. Sidi's pride increases after her photographs are published in a _____.

Answer: magazine

20. Sadiku, Baroka's senior wife, plays a key role in his attempt to marry _____.

Answer: Sidi

21. The protagonist of *Things Fall Apart* is _____, a respected leader in Umuofia.

Answer: Okonkwo

22. Okonkwo fears becoming like his father, _____, who was considered weak and unsuccessful.

Answer: Unoka

23. Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, converts to _____, rejecting his father's traditional beliefs.

Answer: Christianity

24. Okonkwo is exiled for seven years after accidentally killing a _____.

Answer: clansman

25. The arrival of the _____ disrupts traditional Igbo society in the novel.

Answer: British/colonizers/missionaries

II. Write the short answers of the following:

1. What is the theme of the poem Judas by Mervyn Morris?

This poem by Mervyn Morris is about Judas' betrayal of Jesus from Judas' perspective. It explores Judas' feelings of being an outsider and distrust by Jesus, who favored others from Galilee over Judas. The poem examines colonial dynamics and represents the point of view of the colonized.

2.What is the character sketch of Judas?

The evangelist comments in John 12:5–6 that Judas spoke fine words about giving money to the poor, but the reality was "not that he cared for the poor, but [that] he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it."

3.What was the tragedy of Judas?

Judas killed himself in horror at his betrayal of Jesus. Judas killed himself because he had betrayed everyone who had stayed loyal to Jesus and so made himself an outcast from his peer group.

4. Why does the poet, Kamala Wijeratne want us to make a medicine with herbs to cure mass lunacy?

Kamala Wijeratne a poet from ceylon wrote her views on peace and harmony. She is a noted poet giving powerful message¹, through this poem "To A Student". According to the poet, this world is filled with hatred and bloodshed. Everywhere we find ethnic scenes. Pieces of human flesh, splinters² of bones, bursts of landmines and other frightening³ spots appear on the streets. These ills should be rooted out. The student is afraid of the circumstances and so he is not in a position, at least to look at the face of his teacher or he cannot listen to the peace message. So this sort⁴ of disease has to be cured.

5.Briefly explain the theme of the poem "To a Student". Kamala Wijeratne a poet from Ceylon wrote her views on peace and harmony¹. She is a noted poet giving powerful message through this poem "To A Student". According to the poet, this world is filled with hatred² and bloodshed³. According to the poet, the student is not able to look at her face. He cannot listen to the advice. It happens become the students mind is filled with fear and anxiety⁴. There we find bloodshed, splinters of bones, bursts of land mines and other frightening things everywhere. Only the news of war and hatred is heard. The student is tired⁵ of this heavy atmosphere. The poet advices the student to think for a while. She asks him to look at the bright future, if all this ethnic⁶ atmosphere is destroyed. A peaceful atmosphere will exist. The dreadening⁷ circumstances after the wars of Ilion, Carthage or Hiroshima should not be repeated. So, the student should be treated properly from the contagions⁸ disease of unrest⁹ and war. Thus the poem suggests a valuable idea to the future generations.

6. What is the theme of the poem gods can die by Edwin Thumboo?

In the poem "Gods Can Die" by Edwin Thumboo, the poet explores the theme of mortality and the fallibility of powerful entities. The poem reflects on the idea that even gods, who are traditionally seen as immortal and invincible, can experience downfall and demise.

7. What is the main theme in the poem?

The theme of a poem is the message an author wants to communicate through the piece. The theme differs from the main idea because the main idea describes what the text is mostly about. Supporting details in a text can help lead a reader to the main idea.

8. What kept the death of the poet from his poems?

"By mourning tongues / The death of the poet was kept from his poems" — One way to interpret these lines would be that the "mourning tongues" are those who remember and recite the poetry of Yeats. Though the poet dies, his poetry survives, the theme explored by the second section of this poem.

9. What is the main idea of the poem The Dying eagle?

The Dying Eagle is one of his best known poems. The poem deals with a simple message that change is inevitable. An aged eagle was the undisputed monarch of his realm. He ruled its territory from the mountain.

10. What is the moral of the poem "The Eagle"?

The eagle is perched above the "wrinkled sea." Observing the world from a place of solitude, the eagle falls "like a thunderbolt." One could easily state that the moral of the story is that regardless how tumultuous the world may seem, one must be willing to face the hazards in order to survive.

11. What does The Eagle Symbolise in the poem The Eagle?

In "The Eagle" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the eagle symbolizes power, majesty, and isolation. It represents the grandeur and dominance of nature, perched high above the world, observing everything below.

12. How is an eagle described?

In general, an eagle is any bird of prey more powerful than a buteo. An eagle may resemble a vulture in build and flight characteristics but has a fully feathered (often crested) head and strong feet equipped with great curved talons. A further difference is in foraging habits: eagles subsist mainly on live prey

13. What is the central argument of Margaret Atwood's "Nature as a Monster" in *Survival*?

Atwood argues that Canadian literature often portrays nature as a hostile, oppressive, and monstrous force, emphasizing survival rather than harmony or conquest.

14. How does Atwood differentiate Canadian literature's portrayal of nature from British and American literary traditions?

British literature often depicts nature as pastoral and tamed, while American literature presents it as a frontier to be conquered. In contrast, Canadian literature views nature as a threatening force that must be endured.

15. Give an example of a Canadian literary work that depicts nature as an oppressive force.

Susanna Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush portrays the Canadian wilderness as harsh and isolating, making survival a constant struggle.

16. What role does the theme of victimhood play in Canadian literature according to Atwood?

Atwood suggests that Canadian protagonists often see themselves as victims of nature, struggling against overwhelming environmental forces rather than triumphing over them.

17. How does Atwood connect gothic elements with nature in Canadian literature?

Atwood points out that Canadian literature often portrays nature as eerie and monstrous, with dark forests and isolation contributing to a sense of fear and paranoia.

18. What does George Lamming mean by exile in *The Pleasures of Exile*?

Lamming describes exile as both a physical and psychological condition, where Caribbean intellectuals experience displacement and alienation while also gaining critical distance to reflect on their identity and colonial history.

19. How does Lamming describe the role of language in the colonial experience?

Lamming sees English as both a tool of colonial oppression and a means of self-expression, where Caribbean writers must navigate between assimilation and forging a distinct postcolonial identity.

20. What is the significance of *The Tempest* in Lamming's *Introduction*?

Lamming reinterprets *The Tempest* as a metaphor for colonialism, with Prospero

representing the European colonizer and Caliban symbolizing the oppressed Caribbean subject, highlighting themes of domination and resistance.

21.What psychological effects of colonialism does Lamming discuss? He explores how colonial rule imposes an inferiority complex on colonized subjects, making them view European culture as superior while struggling with a fragmented identity and feelings of displacement.

22.How does Lamming view writing in the context of exile? He sees writing as both a political act and a form of personal liberation, allowing Caribbean intellectuals to challenge colonial narratives, reclaim history, and shape a new cultural consciousness.

23. What does Lakunle represent in the play? Lakunle represents modernity and Western ideals, advocating for changes such as the rejection of bride price and the adoption of European customs.

24.Why does Sidi initially reject Lakunle's proposal? Sidi refuses to marry Lakunle because he refuses to pay the bride price, which she sees as an important cultural tradition.

25.How does Baroka win Sidi over despite her initial rejection? Baroka uses his cunning and manipulative skills, including deceiving Sidi into believing he has lost his virility, ultimately persuading her to marry him.

26.What role does Sadiku play in the story? Sadiku serves as Baroka's senior wife and intermediary in his courtship of Sidi, unknowingly helping him deceive Sidi into marriage.

27.How does Soyinka use satire in the play? Soyinka satirizes both blind Westernization, as seen in Lakunle's naive beliefs, and rigid adherence to tradition, as demonstrated by Baroka's manipulations.

28.What is the primary cause of Okonkwo's downfall in *Things Fall Apart*? Okonkwo's downfall is caused by his rigid adherence to traditional masculinity, his fear of change, and his inability to adapt to the societal transformations brought by colonialism.

29.How does Nwoye's character contrast with Okonkwo's beliefs? Nwoye is sensitive and open to new ideas, embracing Christianity, while Okonkwo values traditional Igbo customs and views Nwoye's actions as a betrayal.

30. How does Achebe challenge European portrayals of Africa in *Things Fall Apart*?

Achebe provides a nuanced and authentic depiction of Igbo society, countering colonial literature that often depicted Africans as primitive and uncivilized.

III. Write an essay on the following:

1. Judas by Mervyn Morris

This poem was written by Mervyn Eustes Morris a Jamaican poet. Morris usually stresses upon the importance of nation and its language through his verse. He wants to redefine the aspect of Jamaican culture and their creole language. In the first stanza it had told that the master gave Judas a mocking smile. But actually Christ simply smiled at Judas, but in these lines Morris has exaggerated the smile into a mocking smile. The word 'mocking' seemed to be the striking word and therefore poet wanted to highlight the 'mocking glance' of the master.

The poet explains the Judas feeling of being partial by his master who had given the priority for John to sit in his right. This was again the poet's partial feeling even in his own homeland by the colonisers. He has said that the truth which is in the side of colonised is always complicated in the foreign eyes. Also the coloniser is the "knowing judge of man" in the sense whatever they say is believed by the world. On the whole the poem 'Judas' by Mervyn Morris is nothing but a representation of history by the point of view of the victim. He had deconstructed the real and the past i.e. deconstructing the already existing ideas. Also he wanted to say that the colonised people's ideas and life thoughts are not accepted whereas the colonisers ideology, life and thoughts were accepted. The poet uses the word 'master' and 'lord' for Christ in order to avoid the religious conflict. Though he describes the pathetic condition of 'colonised' people in the poem the comparison used in this poem is quite controversial however the poet tried to escape of controversies through his careful selection of words and diction.

The old man out is always
Judas 'we're from Galilee'

2. To a student by Kamala Wijeratne

The poem is set in the backdrop of violence in Sri Lanka between the Singhalese and the Tamils. The teacher addresses her students who are both Tamils and Singhalese and motivates them to find solutions rather than worry about the situation. She expresses concern for her students by stating that she understands why they fail to maintain eye contact with the teacher. She also knows that their ears are stopped against her voice because the echoes of gunshots have blocked all

unwanted sounds. The grenades have caused damage to their eardrums. They are unable to concentrate in class as they are worried about their brother, friend and lover. The teacher expresses her concern and says that she is also exposed to the violence of the place with human flesh suspended from bushes and trees, the pieces of splintered bones scattered everywhere and the pools of blood seen on the roads. She hears the echoes of the blast of landmines. Here the teacher expresses her concern for human kind. The teacher suggests the students to have a positive outlook towards life by not concentrating on unkind sound and violence. She requests them to leave behind all brand names and work towards finding a solution to the problem. She reminds them about how herbs were made into a cooling poultice to heal wounds and asks students to find solutions to the problem of mass lunacy of people. The teacher asks the students not to focus on the ruins of cities like Illions and Carthages that were destroyed in war and leave it to the interest of antique dealers. finally she assures the students that a fresh methodology has to be planned out to stop war and incidences like Hiroshima.

Gods Can Die by Edwin Thumboo

Summary:

The Business Times named Gods Can Die one of the top ten English Singapore books from 1965

to 2015 in 2015, alongside titles by Goh Poh Seng and Daren Shiau. Thumboo's poetry is

inspired by myth and history, and his poems with nationalistic themes have earned him the title

of Singapore's unofficial poet laureate. He was a pioneer of local English literature, compiling

and editing some of the first anthologies of Singaporean and Malaysian English poetry and

fiction.

Gods Can Die is his second collection of poetry for adults. It was a collection that revealed a

young Singapore's search for a national identity through its daring exploration of social and

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Analysis of the Story: Those of us who are familiar with Singapore's literary scene will applaud the publication of Gods Can Die. Edwin Thumboo is unquestionably the most powerful voice of literary consciousness in that part of the world today, and it is heartening to note that, after a twenty-one-year hiatus, he has decided to compile his poems into a book once more. Rib of Earth (1956), his first collection of poems, revealed a poetic talent uncommon in someone who expresses himself through an acquired language.

Thumboo has not only ably fulfilled the promise so clearly demonstrated in that first volume, but has also greatly refined his style to offer mature poetry that depicts the environment in which he writes forcefully. In these days, when almost any literature from former colonies is met with enthusiasm, it is necessary to be

able to distinguish the truly worthwhile from the merely impressionistic. This cannot be overstated, as Lee Tzu Pheng (an eminent poet herself) writes in her Foreword to *Gods Can Die*.

Even when delivered with the best of intentions and zeal, much of what passes for poetry nowadays contributes little to the state of the art, and even less to its reception by an unconvinced public. The situation is especially hospitable in countries that are now recognized as having an emerging English literature. Confidence in the authenticity of English as a literary medium in situations where English is a second language has bred attitudes that equate this authenticity with a general license to admit almost anything attempted in English as "creative." Indeed, in our enthusiasm, we may have neglected to be critical.

Themes:

Voice of an Age All these factors make it wholly inadequate to celebrate Thumboo's legacy for its impact only and not its intrigue as well. It is also a serious mistake to use him not just to initiate thoughts on Singaporean literature but essentially to frame them.

Poetry for the People The second dimension concerns the flip side of situatedness, Thumboo's own conscious engagement with socio-political issues and academic trends regarding postcolonial literatures. This writer had steered away from leftist politics very early after his implication in the Fajar affair, being in the editorial team of the University of Malaya's socialist journal that was charged then.

Man of the World The third dimension to the enigmatic Thumboo is the public role he assumes within Singapore's society and for his country's reputation abroad. This poet has commanded for decades a strong Virgilian proximity to power on the island that no other Singaporean writer, past or present, is known to enjoy.

One among Friends My fourth and last dimension can be put simply: it is the complex appeal of Thumboo the person. Reputation in a small and still relatively young literary culture tends to be built as much on a writer's personality as on his or her body of works. The Thumbooesque All these dimensions make Thumboo the exact kind of individual who is best suited to reside at the envisioned core of a national literature. Unfortunately, we will be doomed to questions of causality if we aim to seek out whether the construction of his importance owes most to his historical place, the artistic directions he takes, his orchestration of culture or his own personality.

Culture of One On this note, it is possible to return to counter the familiar charge that Thumboo writes to endorse and vindicate the PAP's political dominance. This perspective conflates the state's and the poet's form of nation-building to make

claims similar to this one by Watson: "Thumboo's voice is almost at one with PAP national rhetoric" (192).

4. The Dying Eagle by E.J. Pratt

"The Dying Eagle" by E.J. Pratt is a powerful and poignant poem that explores the themes of nature, mortality, and the inevitable decline of life. The poem, written in 1920, evokes a sense of melancholy and sadness as it depicts the final moments of a majestic and once mighty eagle. Throughout the poem, Pratt uses vivid imagery and skillful wordsmithing to paint a vivid picture of the dying eagle. He describes the bird as "blood-slaked" and "low-drooping," suggesting that it is weakened and close to death. The eagle, once a symbol of strength and power, is now depicted as feeble and frail, struggling to hold on to life. This stark contrast emphasizes the ephemeral and fragile nature of life. Pratt further explores the theme of mortality through his portrayal of the surrounding environment. The eagle's habitat, once filled with life and vitality, is now described as a "waste of sand" with "stunted pines." This imagery suggests a decaying and desolate landscape, mirroring the declining state of the dying eagle. It symbolizes the transient and impermanent nature of existence, reminding the reader of our own mortality. The poet also weaves a sense of tragedy into the poem, demonstrating the emotional impact of witnessing the eagle's demise. He describes the bird's "shrill cries" and its frantic attempts to soar one last time. This evokes a sense of sympathy and sorrow, as the poet recognizes the tragedy of a once powerful creature now reduced to a state of helplessness. Through these descriptions, Pratt explores the fragility of life and the universal experience of facing death. In addition to the exploration of mortality and tragedy, Pratt also touches upon the broader theme of the natural world. The dying eagle can be seen as a metaphor for the decline and destruction of nature itself. The poem was written during a time when environmental degradation was becoming increasingly evident, and Pratt's depiction of the dying eagle may serve as a metaphorical warning about the consequences of human actions on the natural world. "The Dying Eagle" is a work of art that not only showcases Pratt's mastery of poetic language but also raises profound questions about life, death, and our impact on nature. Through the poignant imagery and symbolism used throughout the poem, Pratt invites the reader to contemplate the fleeting beauty of life and the importance of cherishing and preserving the natural world. It serves as a reminder that all things in life are bound by a cycle of birth, decay, and ultimately, death.

5. Nature as a Monster by Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood's essay *"Nature as a Monster"*, which is a section from *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). This book analyzes themes in

Canadian literature, particularly how Canadian identity is shaped by its relationship with nature, survival, and victimhood.

Margaret Atwood, one of Canada's most celebrated authors and literary critics, explores the theme of nature in Canadian literature in her seminal work *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). In Chapter 2, titled "*Nature as a Monster*," Atwood presents the argument that Canadian literature often portrays nature not as a nurturing or harmonious force, but as a hostile, oppressive, and even monstrous entity. Unlike British literature, where nature is often pastoral and tamed, or American literature, where the frontier is a place of opportunity and conquest, Canadian literature tends to depict the natural world as something that must be survived rather than embraced. This essay explores Atwood's argument by examining her key ideas, providing literary examples, and considering the broader implications of this perspective on Canadian identity and cultural consciousness.

Nature as an Oppressive Force

Atwood argues that in much of Canadian literature, nature is not a benign or picturesque backdrop but an active force that threatens human existence. The harsh Canadian landscape—its vast, uninhabited wilderness, its long, brutal winters, and its unpredictable elements—creates an environment in which survival becomes the primary concern. This perspective stems from Canada's history, where early settlers and Indigenous peoples had to endure extreme conditions to live in the land. Atwood suggests that this historical reality has deeply influenced Canadian literature, leading to a tradition of stories that focus on humans struggling against nature rather than coexisting with it.

For example, in *Susanna Moodie's Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), the protagonist faces an unforgiving wilderness that isolates her from civilization and tests her endurance. The novel portrays nature as wild and uncaring, a stark contrast to the idyllic landscapes often found in British literature. Similarly, in *Frederick Philip Grove's Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), the protagonist fights against the harsh Canadian prairie, which seems indifferent to human suffering. These works reinforce Atwood's claim that in Canadian literature, nature is more of a threat than a comfort.

The Theme of Victimhood and Struggle

Another key aspect of Atwood's argument is that Canadian literature often presents characters as victims of nature. This theme of victimhood, which runs through *Survival*, suggests that Canadian protagonists frequently struggle against forces

beyond their control—whether they be environmental, societal, or psychological. In *"Nature as a Monster,"* Atwood argues that the natural world is one of the primary sources of this victimization.

This is evident in works like *Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House* (1941), where the harsh prairie landscape mirrors the emotional and psychological struggles of the characters. The endless wind, dust, and isolation contribute to a sense of despair and entrapment. Similarly, in *Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel* (1964), the rural setting becomes a reflection of the protagonist's inner turmoil, reinforcing the idea that nature is not a source of peace but rather a force that exacerbates human suffering.

The Gothic and Monstrous Aspects of Nature

Atwood also points out that Canadian literature frequently incorporates gothic elements, portraying nature as eerie, lurking, and almost supernatural. This is particularly evident in early settler narratives, where the dense forests and vast wildernesses evoke fear and paranoia. The idea of being watched by an unseen presence, of losing one's way in the uncharted wild, adds to the sense of nature as monstrous.

This theme appears in *Emily Carr's* writing, where the dense, towering forests of British Columbia seem almost alive, overwhelming and consuming the human presence within them. In *Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man* (1969), the chaotic and unpredictable landscape mirrors the disorder in the protagonist's life. These literary examples suggest that Canadian nature is often depicted as something ominous and uncontrollable, adding a gothic dimension to the nation's literary tradition.

Contrast with Other Literary Traditions

One of Atwood's most striking arguments is the contrast between Canadian, British, and American literary traditions in their portrayal of nature. British literature, shaped by a long history of agricultural civilization, often presents nature as tamed and picturesque, with pastoral landscapes evoking nostalgia and harmony. American literature, influenced by the concept of Manifest Destiny, typically portrays nature as a frontier to be conquered and civilized, a source of endless possibility.

In contrast, Canadian literature lacks this sense of control or conquest. Instead of overcoming nature, Canadian characters are often at its mercy. This fundamental

difference shapes Canada's literary identity, emphasizing endurance and adaptation rather than triumph. This perspective aligns with Canada's historical reality, where Indigenous peoples, early settlers, and later inhabitants had to learn to survive in an environment that was often indifferent, if not actively hostile, to human presence.

Conclusion

Atwood's *"Nature as a Monster"* presents a compelling analysis of Canadian literature's unique relationship with the natural world. Rather than depicting nature as a source of beauty, inspiration, or conquest, Canadian writers often portray it as a monstrous, indifferent force that must be endured. This theme reflects Canada's historical experience and cultural consciousness, reinforcing the idea that survival, rather than dominance, is at the heart of Canadian identity. By identifying this recurring motif, Atwood provides a valuable framework for understanding Canadian literature and the broader national psyche. Her insights continue to shape literary criticism and discussions about Canada's place in the global literary landscape.

6. "Introduction" from *The Pleasures of Exile* by George Lamming

George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) is a seminal work that explores the experiences of exile, colonialism, and identity from a Caribbean perspective. In the *Introduction* to this collection of essays, Lamming presents a critical and deeply personal reflection on the psychological and cultural impact of colonialism on Caribbean people, particularly in relation to language, history, and identity. His work blends autobiography, literary criticism, and postcolonial theory, making it a powerful exploration of the Caribbean intellectual's position in a world shaped by European domination. This essay delves into Lamming's key arguments in the *Introduction*, analyzing his discussion of exile, identity, and the colonial legacy.

Exile as a Condition of the Caribbean Intellectual

Lamming frames exile as both a physical and psychological condition that defines the experience of the Caribbean intellectual. He himself experienced exile when he left his native Barbados for England, a journey undertaken by many Caribbean writers of his generation. He sees exile as not merely a geographical displacement but also an emotional and intellectual state where one is caught between two worlds—one's colonial homeland and the imperial metropole.

In the *Introduction*, Lamming acknowledges the ambivalence of exile. On the one hand, it brings estrangement, isolation, and a sense of alienation from one's

cultural roots. On the other, it provides intellectual distance that enables a more critical reflection on one's home, culture, and identity. He argues that Caribbean writers and thinkers, by virtue of their exile, are uniquely positioned to critique both the colonial past and the postcolonial present.

Language and the Legacy of Colonialism

A significant theme in Lamming's *Introduction* is the role of language in the colonial experience. He discusses how English, the language imposed by the colonizers, becomes both a tool of oppression and a means of self-expression for Caribbean writers. While English is the language of the colonial master, it is also the medium through which Caribbean people articulate their history, struggles, and aspirations.

Lamming draws attention to the contradictions inherent in writing in the language of the oppressor. He explores how Caribbean writers must navigate between assimilation into the colonial linguistic structure and the need to forge a distinct postcolonial identity through their creative use of language. His work echoes the concerns of other postcolonial thinkers, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who later advocated for writing in indigenous languages as a form of cultural resistance.

The Role of History and Memory

Lamming emphasizes the importance of history and memory in shaping Caribbean identity. He critiques the way colonial education distorts history, presenting a Eurocentric narrative that marginalizes the experiences and contributions of colonized peoples. In the *Introduction*, he argues that recovering and rewriting history is essential for Caribbean people to reclaim their sense of self.

He uses *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's play, as a metaphor for the colonial condition, with Prospero representing the European colonizer and Caliban symbolizing the colonized Caribbean subject. By reinterpreting *The Tempest* through a Caribbean lens, Lamming challenges dominant historical narratives and reclaims the power of storytelling as a means of resistance.

The Psychological Effects of Colonialism

Lamming also explores the deep psychological impact of colonial rule. He discusses the inferiority complex imposed on colonized subjects through cultural and educational systems designed to reinforce European superiority. The colonial

subject is taught to see Europe as the center of civilization and to view their own culture as secondary or even primitive.

This psychological conditioning creates a fragmented identity, where the Caribbean subject struggles with feelings of inadequacy and displacement. Lamming argues that the process of decolonization must involve not just political independence but also a reassertion of cultural pride and psychological emancipation.

The Paradox of Exile and the Pleasures of Writing

Despite its challenges, Lamming acknowledges that exile has an unexpected benefit—it allows for critical detachment and creative exploration. He describes the act of writing as a form of reclaiming identity and shaping the postcolonial future. His title, *The Pleasures of Exile*, reflects this paradox: exile is painful, but it also provides the intellectual and artistic freedom necessary for self-discovery and resistance.

Lamming sees Caribbean writers as crucial figures in shaping a new cultural consciousness. Through their literature, they can challenge colonial myths, rewrite history, and articulate the complexities of postcolonial identity. Writing, for Lamming, is both a political act and a means of personal liberation.

Conclusion

George Lamming's *Introduction* to *The Pleasures of Exile* offers a profound and multi-layered exploration of exile, colonialism, and identity. His reflections on the psychological effects of colonialism, the complexities of language, and the necessity of reclaiming history continue to resonate in postcolonial studies. By positioning exile as both a burden and an opportunity, Lamming challenges Caribbean intellectuals to use their unique perspective to critique and redefine their cultural heritage. His work remains a vital contribution to understanding the enduring effects of colonialism and the ongoing struggle for identity and self-determination in the Caribbean and beyond.

7. *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* is one of the most celebrated plays in African literature. First performed in 1959 and published in 1963, the play is a satirical comedy that explores themes of tradition versus modernity, gender roles, power dynamics, and the effects of colonialism on African societies. Set in the

fictional Yoruba village of Ilujinle, the play focuses on the rivalry between Lakunle, a Western-educated teacher, and Baroka, the traditional village chief, as they both compete for the hand of Sidi, the beautiful village belle. This essay explores the major themes, characters, and literary techniques used in *The Lion and the Jewel* to highlight Soyinka's critique of colonial influence and his nuanced portrayal of African identity.

Plot Summary

The play is structured into three acts—*Morning*, *Noon*, and *Night*—each representing different times of the day and symbolizing the progression of events.

- In *Morning*, Lakunle, a young teacher, tries to convince Sidi to marry him, advocating for modern values such as monogamy and rejecting the practice of bride price. However, Sidi resists, preferring traditional customs. The arrival of a photographer who has published Sidi's pictures in a magazine inflates her pride and sets the stage for her later decisions.
- In *Noon*, Baroka, the old but cunning village chief, devises a plan to woo Sidi. Though initially dismissed as too old, he uses his wit and charm to manipulate events in his favor.
- In *Night*, Baroka successfully seduces Sidi, using deception and emotional appeal, ultimately winning her over and reinforcing the resilience of tradition over modernity.

Major Themes

1. *Tradition vs. Modernity*

One of the central conflicts in *The Lion and the Jewel* is the struggle between traditional African values and Western modernity. Lakunle represents modernity, with his Westernized education and rejection of cultural practices such as the bride price, which he sees as outdated and demeaning. However, he is also shown to be naive and somewhat hypocritical, as his understanding of modernization is shallow and condescending.

On the other hand, Baroka symbolizes tradition. Despite his age and adherence to traditional practices, he is depicted as intelligent and adaptable, using his wisdom to outmaneuver Lakunle. The play suggests that African societies should not blindly accept Western values but should instead find ways to integrate beneficial aspects of modernity while preserving their cultural heritage.

2. The Role of Women and Gender Dynamics

Soyinka explores the role of women in a patriarchal society through the character of Sidi. She initially appears strong-willed and independent, reveling in her newfound fame after seeing her pictures published. However, by the end of the play, she becomes a symbol of how women are often subject to the decisions and manipulations of powerful men. The rivalry between Baroka and Lakunle over her reflects broader gender dynamics, where women's choices are often influenced by societal expectations and male dominance.

3. The Power of Cunning Over Knowledge

Lakunle represents bookish knowledge, but his failure to win Sidi's affection shows that intelligence alone is insufficient without an understanding of human nature and culture. Baroka, despite being uneducated in the Western sense, proves to be more effective in achieving his desires because of his deep understanding of people and their motivations. Soyinka thus critiques the blind adoption of Western education as superior, emphasizing that wisdom and adaptability are just as important.

4. Colonial Influence and Satire

Through humorous dialogues and situations, Soyinka satirizes both traditional and modern characters. Lakunle's exaggerated speech, filled with grandiose English words and ideas he does not fully grasp, mocks those who blindly embrace Western culture without understanding its practical implications. At the same time, Baroka's manipulations and polygamous tendencies reveal the flaws in blindly following tradition. The play ultimately presents a nuanced view, suggesting that a balance between the two extremes is necessary for progress.

Character Analysis

1. Baroka (The Lion)

Baroka, the Bale (chief) of Ilujinle, is the embodiment of traditional African leadership. He is clever, strategic, and willing to adapt when necessary. Despite his age, he outsmarts both Lakunle and Sidi, demonstrating that intelligence is not confined to formal education. His success in winning Sidi highlights the power of wisdom and experience over mere theoretical knowledge.

2. *Lakunle*

Lakunle is the young, Western-educated schoolteacher who dreams of transforming Ilujinle into a modern town. However, his lack of cultural sensitivity and his arrogant attitude make him less appealing. His rejection of bride price and other traditions is not based on genuine concern for women's rights but on his desire to impose Western ideals. His failure to win Sidi symbolizes the limitations of blindly adopting foreign concepts without understanding local realities.

3. *Sidi (The Jewel)*

Sidi is the village beauty whose fame increases after her photographs appear in a foreign magazine. She initially enjoys her newfound importance and resists both Lakunle's modernist views and Baroka's advances. However, her eventual decision to marry Baroka suggests that she is ultimately swayed by traditional expectations, reinforcing the idea that tradition still holds strong influence in African societies.

4. *Sadiku*

Sadiku, Baroka's senior wife, serves as the intermediary in his courtship of Sidi. She represents older women who have internalized and uphold patriarchal values. Despite her initial excitement at the thought of Baroka's downfall, she unwittingly helps him achieve his goal, showing how women can also play a role in sustaining traditional structures.

Literary Techniques in the Play

Soyinka employs several literary techniques to enhance the play's themes and humor:

- Satire: Used to critique both the blind adoption of Western values and the rigid adherence to tradition.
- Symbolism: The contrast between the *Lion* (Baroka) and the *Jewel* (Sidi) reflects the struggle between experience and youth, power and beauty.
- Irony: Lakunle's failure despite his belief in his superiority, and Baroka's success despite his supposed decline, create dramatic irony.
- Traditional African Performance Elements: The play incorporates dance, music, and storytelling, blending oral traditions with modern theatrical forms.

Conclusion

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* is a masterful exploration of the tensions between tradition and modernity, gender roles, and the influence of colonialism. Through the interactions of Baroka, Lakunle, and Sidi, Soyinka critiques both the blind acceptance of Westernization and the unyielding grip of traditional values. The play remains relevant as it raises important questions about cultural identity, modernization, and the roles individuals play in shaping their societies. Soyinka's use of satire, symbolism, and traditional African elements ensures that *The Lion and the Jewel* remains a timeless and insightful work in African literature.

8. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is one of the most significant and widely read novels in African literature. Set in pre-colonial Nigeria, the novel chronicles the life of Okonkwo, a respected leader and warrior in the Igbo village of Umuofia. Achebe masterfully explores themes of tradition, change, colonialism, and identity through the tragic downfall of his protagonist. *Things Fall Apart* serves as a counter-narrative to the Eurocentric portrayal of Africa and provides a nuanced depiction of Igbo culture before and during the arrival of European colonialism. This essay examines the novel's major themes, characters, and Achebe's literary techniques, highlighting its lasting impact on postcolonial literature.

Plot Summary

The novel is divided into three parts:

1. Part One introduces Okonkwo as a man of great ambition who has risen to prominence through hard work and determination. He is haunted by the fear of becoming like his father, Unoka, who was perceived as weak and unsuccessful. The narrative delves into Igbo traditions, customs, and social structures. A major event occurs when Okonkwo inadvertently kills a clansman and is exiled for seven years as punishment.
2. Part Two focuses on Okonkwo's exile in his mother's village, Mbanta. During this period, European missionaries arrive, introducing Christianity and Western ideologies. Okonkwo watches with concern as his son, Nwoye, converts to Christianity, signaling the beginning of a cultural shift.
3. Part Three depicts Okonkwo's return to Umuofia, where he finds his society transformed by colonial rule. The new religion and government have significantly altered traditional structures, leading to division and conflict.

Unable to accept these changes, Okonkwo takes a drastic step by rebelling against the colonial authorities, ultimately leading to his tragic demise.

Major Themes

1. Tradition vs. Change

One of the central conflicts in *Things Fall Apart* is the struggle between traditional Igbo customs and the disruptive forces of colonialism. Okonkwo represents the old ways, valuing strength, masculinity, and adherence to cultural traditions. However, the arrival of the Europeans introduces new religious and political structures, leading to internal conflicts within Igbo society. Achebe portrays this clash with complexity, showing both the strengths and weaknesses of tradition and modernity.

2. Colonialism and Its Effects

The novel critically examines the impact of British colonialism on Igbo society. The European missionaries and colonial administrators gradually dismantle traditional structures, imposing their own legal and religious systems. This transformation leads to the erosion of Igbo culture, resulting in loss of identity and division among the people. Achebe does not present colonialism in purely negative terms but instead illustrates its dual impact—both destructive and transformative.

3. Masculinity and Fear of Weakness

Okonkwo's character is deeply influenced by his fear of weakness, which stems from his disdain for his father's perceived failures. He equates masculinity with strength, aggression, and control, rejecting any signs of emotional vulnerability. This obsession with appearing strong leads to his downfall, as he refuses to adapt to the changes happening around him. Achebe critiques rigid gender norms and highlights the dangers of toxic masculinity.

4. Fate and Free Will

The tension between fate and personal agency is a recurring theme in the novel. Okonkwo believes in hard work and personal effort, yet his downfall suggests that destiny also plays a role in shaping one's life. His exile, the coming of the colonizers, and the eventual collapse of his world seem inevitable, raising questions about whether he ever truly had control over his fate.

Character Analysis

1. Okonkwo

Okonkwo is the novel's tragic hero, embodying the strengths and flaws of his society. He is determined, hardworking, and a firm believer in tradition. However, his rigidity and inability to accept change ultimately lead to his downfall. His suicide is symbolic of the cultural collapse faced by the Igbo people under colonial rule.

2. Nwoye

Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, represents the new generation torn between tradition and modernity. He finds solace in Christianity, rejecting his father's rigid expectations. His conversion highlights the cultural shifts occurring in Igbo society and the generational divide caused by colonial influence.

3. Unoka

Unoka, Okonkwo's father, is characterized by his love for music and his lack of material success. Although he is viewed as weak and irresponsible by Okonkwo, Unoka's character challenges the rigid definitions of success and masculinity upheld by his son.

4. Obierika

Obierika, Okonkwo's close friend, serves as a more reflective and open-minded counterpart to Okonkwo. Unlike Okonkwo, he questions some of the traditional customs and is willing to adapt to change. His character provides an alternative perspective on the events unfolding in Umuofia.

5. The District Commissioner

The District Commissioner symbolizes the colonial authority that seeks to impose European rule over the Igbo people. His lack of understanding and dismissive attitude toward Igbo culture illustrate the arrogance and ethnocentrism of colonial administrators.

Achebe's Literary Techniques

Achebe employs various literary techniques to enhance the depth and authenticity of *Things Fall Apart*:

- Use of Proverbs: Achebe incorporates Igbo proverbs throughout the novel to reflect the wisdom and traditions of the culture. Proverbs serve as a means of storytelling and communication in Igbo society.
- Multiple Perspectives: Unlike colonial literature that often depicts Africans as primitive, Achebe provides a rich and nuanced portrayal of Igbo life, giving voice to indigenous perspectives.
- Tragic Hero Structure: The novel follows the classical structure of a tragic hero, with Okonkwo's rise, his tragic flaw, and his ultimate downfall.
- Oral Tradition Elements: Achebe integrates elements of Igbo oral traditions, including folktales and communal storytelling, making the narrative feel authentic and rooted in African culture.

Conclusion

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* remains a landmark novel in African literature, offering a powerful critique of colonialism and a profound exploration of cultural identity, tradition, and change. Through the tragic story of Okonkwo and the transformation of Umuofia, Achebe presents a compelling narrative that challenges Western stereotypes of Africa and highlights the complexities of pre-colonial and colonial African societies. The novel's enduring relevance continues to influence contemporary discussions on postcolonial identity, cultural heritage, and the impact of historical change on indigenous communities.