A Far Cry from Africa Study Guide

A Far Cry from Africa by Derek Walcott

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Introduction

Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa," published in 1962, is a painful and jarring depiction of ethnic conflict and divided loyalties. The opening images of the poem are drawn from accounts of the Mau Mau Uprising, an extended and bloody battle during the 1950s between European settlers and the native Kikuyu tribe in what is now the republic of Kenya. In the early twentieth century, the first white settlers arrived in the region, forcing the Kikuyu people off of their tribal lands. Europeans took control of farmland and the government, relegating the Kikuyu to a subservient position. One faction of the Kikuyu people formed Mau Mau, a terrorist organization intent on purging all European influence from the country, but less strident Kikuyus attempted either to remain neutral or to help the British defeat Mau Mau.

The ongoings in Kenya magnified an internal strife within the poet concerning his own mixed heritage. Walcott has both African and European roots; his grandmothers were both black, and both grandfathers were white. In addition, at the time the poem was written, the poet's country of birth, the island of St. Lucia, was still a colony of Great Britain. While Walcott opposes colonialism and would therefore seem to be sympathetic to a revolution with an anticolonial cause, he has passionate reservations about Mau Mau: they are, or are reported to be, extremely violent□to animals, whites, and Kikuyu perceived as traitors to the Mau Mau cause. As Walcott is divided in two, so too is the poem. The first two stanzas refer to the Kenyan conflict, while the second two address the war within the poet-as-outsider/insider, between his roles as blood insider but geographical outsider to the Mau Mau Uprising. The Mau Mau Uprising, which began in 1952, was put down□some say in 1953, 1956, or 1960□without a treaty, yet the British did leave Kenya in 1963. Just as the uprising was never cleanly resolved, Walcott, at least within the poem, never resolves his conflict about whose side to take.

Author Biography

Derek Walcott was born January 23, 1930, in the capital city of Castries on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Lucia, a territory at that time under the dominance of Britain. While the official language of St. Lucia was English, Walcott grew up also speaking a French-English patois. Both of his grandfathers were white and both grandmothers were black. From the beginning, Walcott was, in terms of St. Lucia, a bit of an outsider. In a poor, Catholic country, his parents were middle class and Protestant: his mother was a teacher at a Methodist grammar school who worked in local theater, and his father was a civil servant by vocation and a fine artist and poet by avocation. Walcott's father died shortly after Derek and his twin brother were born. The Walcott home was filled with books, paintings, and recorded music. Walcott studied painting and published, at age fourteen, his first poem. At eighteen, Walcott borrowed $200 from his mother to publish his first book, *25 Poems.* To pay back his mother, he sold copies of the book to his friends.

In his early years, Walcott was schooled on St. Lucia, but in 1950, he attended the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, getting his degree in 1953 but staying on one more year to study education. From 1954 to 1957, Walcott taught in Grenada, St. Lucia, and Jamaica, and wrote and produced plays along with his brother, Roderick. In 1954, Walcott married. Since then he has been married three times and has had three children. In 1958, his play *Drums and Colours* earned him a Rockefeller grant to study theater in New York City. Alienated in the United States, Walcott returned to Trinidad in 1959 to found, with his brother, The Trinidad Theater Workshop, a project that lasted until 1976. From 1960 to 1968, Walcott also wrote for the local newspaper, the *Trinidad Guardian*.

Walcott has taught in both America and the West Indies and has earned numerous awards. He has taught at New York University, Yale, Columbia, Harvard, and, since 1981, at Boston University. Walcott has won numerous awards: in 1965 he received the Royal Society of Literature Heinemann Award for *The Castaway and Other Poems*; his play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* earned the 1971 Obie for the most distinguished off-Broadway play; in 1977 he was awarded a Guggenheim and in 1981 a MacArthur Foundation Award. In 1992, however, Walcott received literature's highest honor, the Nobel Prize. The author of more than twenty books, Walcott continues to write, paint, and direct.

Poem Text

A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:
'Waste no compassion on these separate dead!'
Statistics justify and scholars seize
The salients of colonial policy,
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?
To savages, expendable as Jews?
Threshed out by beaters, the long rushes break
In a white dust of ibises whose cries
Have wheeled since civilization's dawn
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain.
The violence of beast on beast is read
As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,
While he calls courage still that native dread
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.
Again brutish necessity wipes its hands
Upon the napkins of a dirty cause, again
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,
The gorilla wrestles with the superman.
I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

Plot Summary

Background

"A Far Cry from Africa" discusses the events of the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya in the early 1950s. In the mid-twentieth century, British colonialism was a fading but still potent force in the world. In the African nation of Kenya, British colonists had settled and introduced European concepts to the local people: money, taxation, and ownership of land. When the British asked, "Who owns this land?" tribal people responded, "We do," and the British assumed that "we" referred to the tribal government, although the land was actually owned by individual families. Because the British were replacing the tribal government with their own, they then claimed all the land in the name of the new British government. Naturally, the Kenyan people were outraged. Now, instead of owning and farming their own land, they were reduced to being laborers for the British owners. As employees, they were further insulted by being paid only a fraction of the amount a British worker received for doing the same work.

The Kikuyu tribe was the largest in Kenya, and the most educated. In 1951, some Kikuyu outbursts of violence against the British occurred, and in 1952 a secret Kikuyu society known as the Mau Mau began a war of violence against the British and any Africans who were loyal to them. By October of 1952, the situation was so serious that the British called out troops to fight the rebels, and a three-year war ensued, during which 11,000 rebel warriors were killed and 80,000 Kikuyu men, women, and children were locked up in detention camps. One hundred Europeans and 2,000 Africans loyal to them were killed. Later, the leader of the rebellion, Jomo Kenyatta, was elected prime minister of Kenya when Kenya became independent from Britain in 1963.

In the poem, Walcott presents some graphic images of the conflict and asks how he can be expected to choose one side over the other, since he is of both African and European descent. He cannot condone the colonialism of the British, or the violence of the Mau Mau, because choosing either side would mean he is turning against that part of himself.

Lines 1-3:

The first three lines depict the poem's setting on the African plain, or veldt. The nation itself is compared to an animal (perhaps a lion) with a "tawny pelt." Tawny is a color described as light brown to brownish orange that is common color in the African landscape. The word "Kikuyu" serves as the name of a native tribe in Kenya. What seems an idyllic portrayal of the African plain quickly shifts; the Kikuyu are compared to flies (buzzing around the "animal" of Africa) who are feeding on blood, which is present in large enough amounts to create streams.

Lines 4-6:

Walcott shatters the image of a paradise that many associate with Africa by describing a landscape littered with corpses. He adds a sickening detail by referring to a worm, or maggot, that reigns in this setting of decaying human flesh. The worm's admonishment to "Waste no compassion on these separate dead!" is puzzling in that it implies that the victims somehow got what they deserved.

Lines 7-10:

The mention of the words "justify" and "colonial policy," when taken in context with the preceding six lines, finally clarifies the exact event that Walcott is describing□the Mau Mau Uprising against British colonists in Kenya during the 1950s. Where earlier the speaker seemed to blame the victims, he now blames those who forced the colonial system onto Kenya and polarized the population. They cannot justify their actions, because their reasons will never matter to the "white child" who has been murdered□merely because of his color□ in retaliation by Mau Mau fighters or to the "savages," who□in as racist an attitude as was taken by Nazis against Jews□are deemed worthless, or expendable. "Savages" is a controversial term that derives from the French word *sauvage* meaning wild, and is now wholly derogatory in English. Walcott's use of "savage" functions to present a British colonialist's racist point of view.

Lines 11-14:

Walcott shifts gears in these lines and returns to images of Africa's wildlife, in a reminder that the ibises (long-billed wading birds) and other beasts ruled this land long before African or European civilization existed. The poet also describes a centuries- old hunting custom of natives walking in a line through the long grass and beating it to flush out prey. Such killing for sustenance is set against the senseless and random death that native Africans and European settlers perpetrate upon each other.

Lines 15-21:

These lines are simultaneously pro-nature and anticulture. Animals kill merely for food and survival, but humans, having perfected the skill of hunting for food, extend that violent act to other areas, using force to exert control□and prove superiority over□other people; they seek divinity by deciding who lives and who dies. Ironically, wars between people are described as following the beat of a drum□an instrument made of an animal hide stretched over a cylinder. Walcott also points out that for whites, historically, peace has not been the result a compromise with an opponent, but a situation arrived at because the opposition has been crushed and cannot resist anymore.

Lines 22-25:

These lines are difficult to interpret, but they appear to be aimed at those judging the Mau Mau uprising from a distance□observers who could somehow accept brutality as necessary and who are aware of a dire situation but refuse to become involved in it. The poet appears to condemn such an attitude by comparing the Mau Mau Uprising to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Leaders of France and Great Britain wanted to avoid another war that would engulf all of Europe, so they introduced a nonintervention pact that was signed by twentyseven nations. Nonetheless, the Insurgents, or Nationalists (under the leadership of General Francisco Franco), were aided by and received military aid from Germany and Italy. The Loyalists, or Republicans, had no such backing; they fought valiantly but were outmanned, lost territory, and were eventually defeated in March of 1939. Line 25 presents a cynical view of the Mau Mau Uprising as just another colonial conflict where gorillas□negatively animalized Africans□fight with superman□a negative characterization of Europe.

Lines 26-33:

This stanza is a change of scene from primarily that of Africa to that of the poet. Walcott, being a product of both African and English heritage, is torn, because he does not know how to feel about the Mau Mau struggle. He certainly is not satisfied with the stock response of those from the outside. Walcott is sickened by the behavior of Mau Mau just as he has been disgusted by the British. By the end, the poet's dilemma is not reconciled, but one gets the sense that Walcott will abandon neither Africa nor Britain.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

"A Far Cry From Africa" begins with a description of the native Kikuyu tribe that later formed a sub tribe called the Mau Mau in what is now the Republic of Kenya against British rule. Although Walcott never mentions the Mau Mau by name, it can be inferred because of Walcott's history and his expressed intentions.

The first stanza compares Africa to an animal whose "pelt" has been ruffled. The ruffling of the pelt is the uprising of the Kikuyu people. Once the battle is over, corpses lie strewn across the ground. Walcott compares the brutal massacre to the massacre of the Jews. He infers that the British think the African's are as dispensable as Hitler thought the Jews to be.

In the second stanza, Walcott compares the warriors to animals. He says that violence in the animal kingdom is perfectly natural. However, he says that man fights against other men only to seek divinity and not as part of the natural order of things. Despite the fact that the conflict is bloody, the Kikuyu continue to fight because they fear the British rule after the conflict more than they fear death.

In the third stanza, the poem turns to Walcott's personal inner conflict over the war. Walcott is of mixed heritage (both English and African), and he cannot resolve the inner conflict between his hatred of colonialism and his love of England. He openly acknowledges that he is sympathetic to the African cause but at the same time, he still feels ties to England. He questions if he should give them both up. Finally, in the last line, he questions if he could, in good conscience, turn from Africa and continue to live.

Analysis

When Walcott wrote "A Far Cry from Africa" in 1962, British imperialism was slowly crumbling around the world. Many authors such as Walcott who grew up in British colonies and those who were of mixed heritage began exploring their feeling concerning colonialism. This style of writing is called post-colonial. In post-colonial writing, the views of the natives are explored from a native's point of view. Previously, most of the works concerning colonized areas were written by the colonizers.

Walcott offers a unique view of the Mau Mau uprising because he is both attached to Africa, and he has English roots. Walcott received an English education and grew up on an English colony. He was greatly influenced by the English and much of his life and good fortune were shaped by his English roots. However, he sees colonialism as inherently wrong, and he feels that he cannot turn his back on his African roots.

Within the first few lines of the poem, he compares the brutal defeat of the Mau Mau in battle to Hitler's genocide of Jewish people during World War II. Because the poem was

written in 1962 and many holocaust survivors and soldiers who fought in the war were still alive, and because the plight of the Jewish people was still an open wound, his comparison is very serious and it shows how strongly he feels about the British rulers.

The poem offers a different view of colonialism from that explored in other poems, because it explores the inner conflict of mixed heritage brought on by colonialism. Although Walcott is from the Caribbean, his grandmothers were of African decent while his grandfathers were white. Because he is the voice of the colonized, the poem leads the reader to question if all colonized people felt similar to Walcott. Walcott describes himself as being "poisoned by the blood of both." His use of the word poisoned leads the reader to assume that he feels he is in a no win situation. Walcott is cursed by both his heritages and the difficult position they now put him in.

At the same time as he is describing his heritage as poisoned, he described the African's as gorillas and the British as the superman. The idea of the superman was being formed in the 1960's. The idea of the superman explored the "ideal" man and his philosophy in life. Walcott's comparison of the Mau Mau to gorillas makes them animal in nature while the British are refined. This comparison seems to be in conflict with his obvious dislike of colonialism. He is trying to fight against the idea of colonialism while still comparing the Africans to animals and while exalting the British.

He questions at the end of the poem if he could turn from Africa and live. The entire poem deals with death—the death of the Mau Mau in the uprising, the death of colonialism and now the death of the soul. Walcott's question inevitably links his soul to that of the African's plight. Because of this question, the poem looses what earlier appeared to be a man versus man theme and becomes a man versus himself poem.

Themes

Violence and Cruelty

The wind "ruffling the tawny pelt of Africa" refers to the Mau Mau Uprising that occurred in what is now independent Kenya, roughly from October 20, 1952, to January of 1960. During this span, the white government called an emergency meeting against a secret Kikuyu society that came to be known as Mau Mau and was dedicated to overthrowing the white regime. Against the backdrop of a cruel, long-lasting British colonialism erupted the more short-term cruelty of Mau Mau insurrection. While some versions have it that Mau Mau was put down by 1953 and others by 1956, the government kept the state of emergency in place until the beginning of 1960. It is the violence of Mau Mau that most disturbs Walcott, apparently because it makes Africans look even worse than their British oppressors. There were many stories of Mau Mau violence directed at whites, the animals owned by whites, and at other Kikuyus who refused to join Mau Mau. The violence was especially grisly since many of the Kikuyus used a machete-like agricultural implement, the *panga,* to kill or mutilate victims after killing them. One such murder□one that Walcott could be describing in "A Far Cry from Africa"□was reported of a four-and-a-halfyear- old white child. And on March 26, 1953, in the Lari Massacre, Mau Maus killed ninety-seven Kikuyu men, women, and children, apparently for collaborating with the British. But it was not only the violence of insurrection that terrorized animals, whites, and Kikuyus, but also the reportedly gruesome Mau Mau oathing ceremonies in which initiates pledged allegiance to the Mau Mau cause. A Kikuyu schoolmaster gave this account of a ceremony initiating seven members: "We were . . . bound together by goats' small intestines on our shoulders and feet. . . . Then Githinji pricked our right hand middle finger with a needle until it bled. He then brought the chest of a billy goat and its heart still attached to the lungs and smeared them with our blood. He then took a Kikuyu gourd containing blood and with it made a cross on our foreheads and on all important joints saying, 'May this blood mark the faithful and brave members of the Gikuyu and Mumbi [analogues of Adam and Eve] Unity; may this same blood warn you that if you betray secrets or violate the oath, our members will come and cut you into pieces at the joints marked by this blood.'" Before Mau Mau, one gets the impression that Walcott was not so torn between Africa and Britain; he may have viewed British colonialism as arrogant, ignorant, and cruel, and Africa as victimized. But then, when Africans themselves turned violent, Walcott was torn and could not so easily side with Africans against the British.

Culture Clash

There are many clashes in this poem. The first image signalling conflict is the hint of a storm brewing in the opening lines where Kikuyu flies feed upon the land and maggots upon dead Mau Mau. Here is the first of several culture clashes: pro- Mau Mau pitted against anti-Mau Mau Kikuyu. And within this, a subconflict also exists between those Kikuyu believing that the rights of the individual ("these separate dead") do not

necessarily violate those of the group and those convinced that individual rights do violate group rights (the Mau Mau philosophy). In lines six through ten, there is also the clash between the culture of those outside the uprising and those killed by it, outsiders ("scholars") with the luxury of judging the conflict, and insiders (victims) for whom no explanation is suffi- cient. There are also the outsiders of stanza three, surmising that the conflict is not worth their compassion or involvement, a position against which victims would vehemently argue.

Within the poet, all of these exterior clashes also rage. Walcott is pro-African and pro-Kikuyu but anti-Mau Mau, is pro-English (as in culture and language) but anti-British (as in colonialism), an outsider to the conflict, but an insider in the sense that within his body exists both English and African blood. These conflicts yield up the main confrontation of the poem, that between Mau Mau and the British, and the conflict within the poet about which side to take. Walcott is, then, completely conflicted: while both an outsider and insider he is ultimately unable to be either. While both British and African, he is unable to sympathize with either. While both pro-revolution and anti-violence, he cannot defend the uprising or completely condemn it. Still, he feels he must face these clashes, rather than wish or rationalize them away. From the cultural clash on the continent of Africa, the poem moves to the battlefield within the poet□a place less violent but more complex, since Walcott is, at the same time, on both sides and neither side.

Style

"A Far Cry from Africa" contains four stanzas of mostly iambic tetrameter. Actually, the poem starts off in iambic pentameter, the prevalent form of poetry written in English, but it soon veers off course metrically□a change that reflects the changing scene and perspective in the poem□with lines of varying length and number of stresses. A point of consistency is Walcott's use of masculine endings (lines ending with accented syllables) and masculine rhymes (one syllable rhymes). Rhyme is as irregular as meter. The rhyme scheme of the first stanza might be rendered *ababbcdecd* or *ababbaccad*. On the other hand, both of these schemes leave out the related sounds in "Jews," "flies," "seize," and "policy" that give this stanza two basic end sounds upon which lesser or greater variation occurs. The second stanza has its fourth and seventh lines rhyming and also lines five, ten, and eleven. In stanza three, the scheme is *abba*, but in stanza four there is only the rhyme of its sixth and eighth lines. In sum, then, a loose rhyme scheme for two stanzas is present, but none for the other two. Fluctuation between rhyme and non-rhyme, rhyme and nearrhyme, between iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter echoes the poet's own unresolved schism between Africa and Britain.

Historical Context

Most of the area of contemporary Kenya was made a suzerain by the Imperial British East African Company in 1888. The British government then took over administration in 1895, calling the area a "protectorate." White settlers started moving in, cutting down trees, and amassing estates (some of the largest were over 100,000 acres). The migration of both whites and Indians continued, unabated. The settler built roads and a railroad, and, over time, dispossessed a great many Kenyans□mostly Kikuyus□of their land. Once dispossessed, Kikuyus were forced, through tax, work, and identity-paper schemes□and by outright force□into employment, primarily as servants on white estates. To gain back self-government and their land, the Kikuyu Central Association sent representative Jomo Kenyatta to England in 1929. During the next sixteen years, Kenyatta tried unsuccessfully to convince England to alter its method of government in Kenya; he returned to his home country in September of 1946.

In 1947, Kenyatta became president of the Kenya African Union (KAU), a nationalist party demanding an end to the numerous injustices of white rule. These demands were met with British resistance or excuses. While Kikuyus at large were becoming increasingly angry at white rule, a militaristic wing emerged, The Kenya Land Freedom Army, from which the organization Mau Mau grew (origins of this term are unknown but most agree it began as a derogatory label of settlers). On August 4, 1950, Mau Mau was declared illegal, even though the government knew little about it except that militant Kikuyus were winning over, coercing, or forcing other Kikuyus to take an oath against foreign rule. Then, on October 20, 1952, after Mau Mau killings of European cattle and the execution of a Kikuyu chief loyal to the British, a state of emergency was declared and an order sent out for the arrest of 183 people. Kenyatta was one of those arrested and, after a trial, was incarcerated for masterminding Mau Mau. Though this charge was never confirmed, he was imprisoned for seven years.

While fearful whites collected guns to protect their lives and property, the first Kikuyu murder of a white settler occurred a week after the emergency: the settler was hacked to death with a machete-like tool, a *panga.* Some thirteen thousand people and untold animals were to be killed in the Mau Mau anticolonial struggle, most of them Kikuyus. By 1953, the guerilla fighting force of Mau Mau had largely been defeated, and by 1956, the fighting had mostly stopped; the unequal political, economic, and social conditions leading to Mau Mau's rise, however, were still in place. While the state of emergency continued, governmental reforms between 1953 and 1960 did attempt to appease further threats from Mau Mau. The state of emergency finally ended end in 1960, likely well after Walcott finished writing "A Far Cry from Africa." Kenyatta was released from prison in 1961, Kenya gained its independence in 1963, and Kenyatta assumed the presidency in 1964, the same year Martin Luther King received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Walcott was most likely in the English-speaking Caribbean when he wrote "A Far Cry from Africa," an area, like Kenya, under the domination of the British. It was not until the 1930s, at a time of Caribbean social unrest, that even political parties were allowed and universal suffrage introduced. The growth of nationalism and the effects of World War II

led to increasing pressure from West Indians for Britain to loosen its grip. So, in 1958, a federation including most of the English-speaking Caribbean islands was formed to prepare for eventual independence. Increasing friction between the ar chipelago and Britain led to Trinidad and Tobago, as well as Jamaica, withdrawing from the federation and becoming independent in 1962. Walcott's home island, St. Lucia, would not gain its independence until 1979, sixteen years after Kenya attained hers. During the period of greatest Mau Mau activity, Walcott was attending university in Jamaica. Until 1960, he spent most of his time teaching in West Indian schools and working in theater with his brother. It is likely that Walcott's West Indian origins, linked back to part of his family's original homeland in Africa, and the domination of both his country and Kenya by Britain spurred him to take special note of events in Kenya□events that at the time could have been a specter of a similar future for England's Caribbean colonies.

Literary Heritage

Derek Walcott considers himself a Caribbean writer, but he is also viewed as a cosmopolitan, cultivated poet who draws heavily on European, and particularly British, sources. Despite the fact that English was his second language, he is acknowledged to be one of the finest poets writing in English today. However, he was also nurtured by African-Caribbean folktales and slave narratives, and these inspire many of his plays. Ethnically, Walcott comes from a diverse heritage, with African, English, and Dutch ancestors; this diversity is also apparent in his writing.

Critical Overview

When analyzing "A Far Cry from Africa," most critics comment on the poem's message and what it reveals about the poet, rather than the technical aspects of its creation. In an article titled "West Indies II: Walcott, Brathwaite, and Authenticity," Bruce King remarks, "The poem is remarkable for its complexity of emotions" and that it "treats of the Mau Mau uprising in terms that mock the usual justifications for and criticisms of colonialism." King notes that the narrator is stricken with "confused, irreconcilably opposed feelings: identification with black Africa, disgust with the killing of both white and black innocents, distrust of motives, love of the English language, and dislike of those who remain emotionally uninvolved." In his article "Ambiguity Without a Crisis? Twin Traditions, The Individual and Community in Derek Walcott's Essays," Fred D'Aguiar also deals with the division at the heart of the poem: "Already there is the ambivalence which hints at synthesis at the heart of the proclaimed division, a wish to artificially expose long buried oppositions between ancestries in need of reconciliation if the artist□and his community□ are to grow." Though the poet seeks reconciliation, he does not appear to achieve it, which only accentuates his dilemma, a point Rei Terada makes in his *Derek Walcott's Poetry*: "His often antholologized early poem 'A Far Cry from Africa' (1962), for example, places the poet 'Between this Africa and the English tongue I love.' Even in this poem, however, betweenness is not a solution, but an arduous problem. Even here, betweenness cannot adequately conceptualize the poet's position, since betweenness doesn't necessarily question the authenticity of the oppositions supposedly surrounding the poet."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

David Donnell, who teaches at the University of Toronto, has published seven books of poetry. His work is included in the Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, and his volume* Settlement *received Canada's prestigious Governor General's Award. In the following essay, Donnell analyzes "A Far Cry from Africa" as the poet's personal credo.*

Critical Essay #2

Even the title itself of Derek Walcott's lovely poem "A Far Cry from Africa" suggests that the author is writing about an African subject and doing so from a distance. It's an apt title, to be sure; Walcott is of African descent but was born and raised in what we might call the southeast corner of the American sphere without in any way encroaching on West Indies' independence. Writing from the beautiful island of St. Lucia, Walcott feels, as a well-educated and totally independent black West Indian, that he is indeed at some distance from Africa and the brutal atrocities of whites against blacks and blacks against whites that he has been reading about in Kenya, a large African state famous for its Veldt and for its extraordinary wildlife giraffes, antelope, even rhinoceros.

The title "A Far Cry from Africa" may have a second meaning in addition to the obvious geographic and personal sense the author feels. The title also seems to say, "well, look, this is a far cry from the Africa that I have been reading about in descriptions of gorgeous fauna and flora and interesting village customs." And a third level of meaning to the title (without pressing this point too much) is the idea of Walcott hearing the poem as a far cry coming all the way across thousands of miles of ocean the same routes, perhaps, as the Dutch ships of the late seventeenth century to land in his accepting ear on the island of St. Lucia. He hears the cry coming to him on the wind. He writes, in the first line of his poem, "A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt / Of Africa." He has seen photographs of Kenya. He knows that light brown and yellow, of various shades, are two of the most prominent colors of this large African state; they are veldt colors, and there are lions out on the veldt.

"Kikuyu," in the second line, is the only African word in the poem. The Kikuyu were a Kenya tribe who became Mau Mau fighters in a grass-roots effort to oust the British colonial administration of Kenya. Walcott, as if mesmerized, describes the Mau Mau fighters as moving with extraordinary speed they know the geography of their country and they "Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt." The use of the word batten is interesting; it generally means to fasten or secure a hatch on a ship. The upsurge of violence is justified in some ways perhaps, but what rivets Walcott's attention, because he is a well-educated man and a humanist, is given very simply in the following image, still from the powerful opening stanza: "Corpses are scattered through a paradise." Walcott, born on St. Lucia, a lovely island with a fairly low economy, would like to believe that Africa is just as paradisal and peaceful as the West Indies.

Most of Walcott's poems since the early 1960s have been written in very open but quite controlled language. "A Far Cry from Africa" is such a compressed and tightly structured poem that the author tends to cover the ground he wants to talk about point by point and sometimes with what we might call caricatures, or images verging on caricature. "Only the worm, colonel of carrion cries: / Waste no compassion on these separate dead!" He follows this surprising image with two very sharp lines about the foolishness of statistics and alleged political scholars who want to discuss fine points. And then he ends his powerful opening stanza by saying, "What is that to the white child hacked in bed?" Or to Kenyans, he says, who are being treated as if they were "expendable."

What appears to horrify Walcott partly in the case of Kenya is that the conflict and savagery taking place are happening on the basis of color; his reaction is almost Biblical in its unusually compressed and angry personal credo. At no time in this poem does he waste his time referring to any particular historical agreement. He sees the tragedy as essentially human tragedy, and the violence on both sides as essentially inhuman.

Walcott's dilemma seems to be very much in synch with some of the participants in this poem. "Threshed out by beaters," he says at the beginning of the second stanza. The poet has dealt with his initial horror at these events in Kenya and has outlined his initial focus on the general area of comment. He seems to see in this second stanza what he regards as the acceptable violence of nature or "natural law" as having been turned into a nightmare of unacceptable human violence based on color. "Beaters" on big game safaris in Africa are the men who beat the brush, sometimes singing or chanting as they do so, and flush out birds and animals for the hunt. Of course, in a lot of cases, beaters will flush out a variety of animals they hadn't expected.

"A Far Cry from Africa" continues this meditation on the landscape of the Kenyan veldt by saying, "the long rushes break / In a white dust of ibises whose cries / Have wheeled since civilization's dawn / From the parched river or beastteeming plain." Walcott's image of Africa may strike some readers as a bit innocent, but it doesn't seem to be in any way affected or insincere as he expresses himself in this personal credo. Quite the contrary; it seems idealistic and uplifting, although it does leave the reader□and perhaps Walcott as well□in the position of saying, "How can we prevent these outbreaks of violence?" Or, perhaps more specifically, "How can we be fair?" Should the United Nations have intervened on behalf of the Kenyans? This is a very intense and bitter poem□a lashing out at injustice and an attempt to formulate both some distance for the writer as well as a sense of his own eventual or fundamental juxtaposition to the uncomfortable and agonizing subject.

Anthropologists, both American and European, have published an enormous amount of material in the twentieth century on different questions of social personality, physicality, and to what degree many of our fundamental social responses□for example, defensiveness, lust, comfort, and pride□ seem to have an animal basis. Walcott lashes out at both sides of the Kenyan situation from a position in which he strongly and intensely believes that human and animal are not only different but should be regarded at least as absolute opposites, yet he seems to know that this is not the case. But a large portion of the middle of this poem is Walcott's expression of his coming to terms with human nature and the mixed good and bad, up and down, nature of history.

"A Far Cry from Africa" is such an agonizing and didactic personal poem, and such a tightly structured poem in which Walcott never relaxes and explains to the reader in casual asides that he himself is of African descent, that some readers may at first feel that the poem is more a comment on news of the day than it is a personal response, and a credo, and to some extent a partial deconstruction of his own credo. The narrator weighs different examples from the Kenyan upsurge in this poem, and the writer obviously wants to come out on top of his own material. He wants to see the argument

in a perspective that makes some kind of sense, and he doesn't want to get swallowed by his own feelings of anger and outrage at these events.

And so we have the "Kikuyu" and violence in Kenya, violence in a "paradise," and we have "Statistics" that don't mean anything and "scholars" who tend to throw their weight behind colonial policy. Walcott's outrage is very just and by the standards of the late 1960s, even restrained. His sense of amazement and awe, and his desire to love the Africa he describes, surges at one point when he notes what is probably a fairly salient and typical detail of Kenya, how "the long rushes break / In a white dust of ibises whose cries / Have wheeled since civilization's dawn. . . ."

Of course the African continent is nothing if not enormous. The range of geography and of fauna and flora is extraordinary. Different cultures are in different kinds of motion in various parts of the continent. The north of Africa contains some of the old Arabic civilizations of the eastern half of our world, including Libya, which is across the Mediterranean from Italy, and Egypt, where historical records show at least one or more black African Pharaohs before the period of time described in the Bible's New Testament. Walcott may or may not be interested in these ideas; he may or may not have visited Africa at some time. We have to concentrate on the poem and on what happens in the poem. How does he develop his sense of weighing these different negative facts of violence in a paradise of ibises and different cultures?

Walcott could be a little more informative in this poem. For example, he could allude to some of the newspaper reports that he's been reading; he could mention a particular town in Kenya, or a local hero. Even though he identifies Kenya and the great veldt and begins with a powerful opening line that sets the tone and motion for the whole poem ("A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt / Of Africa"), he still wants this poem to be timeless and to apply to other situations in different parts of the world. Near the end of the poem, however, having accomplished his first objective, the charting of the Kenya upsurge and his own humanistic denunciation of brutality, What appears to horrify Walcott partly in the case of Kenya is that the conflict and savagery taking place are happening on the basis of color; his reaction is almost Biblical in its unusually compressed and angry personal credo." Walcott does come into "A Far Cry from Africa"□ and he does so very dramatically.

Perhaps the most brutal and categorical movement in the whole poem occurs after that lovely image of the "ibises" wheeling in historical patterns since "civilization's dawn." Frustrated with every aspect of this brutal color war in Kenya, Walcott comes up with an image that more or less generalizes the history of English, European, and African wars: "his wars / Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum, / While he calls courage still that native dread / Of the white peace contracted by the dead." In this powerful image, coming to the penultimate point of the poem, Walcott says basically that everybody dances, everybody gets emotionally intoxicated with the egoism of taking sides, everybody in that kind of situation is listening to a drumbeat of some kind or another. "Brutish necessity," he calls it, comparing the Kenyan fighters to the revolutionaries in Spain: "A waste of our compassion, as with Spain / The gorilla wrestles with the

superman." At this point, Walcott seems to have spoken out on the issue, identified the problem, and to some degree disposed of the whole subject.

But there is more to "A Far Cry from Africa" than what we have read so far. There is, as a matter of fact, the very fulcrum of his being so involved and so intense about the subject in the first place: not just humanistic anger, but also a very personal outrage. "I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" he says as a beginning to the last stanza. Born and raised in St. Lucia, educated in the British system, and an omnivorous reader by the time he was in high school, Walcott is very much a citizen of the world. Quite a well-known poet by the time he was in his twenties, Walcott had, by the time he wrote "A Far Cry from Africa," spent considerable time in Trinidad, working on different theater projects, and he had also been exhibited as a talented painter.

One of the most moving aspects of this poem, once the reader accepts the very terse, basic, logical arguments regarding the struggle in Kenya, is the general image of the poet/author at the end of the poem. He has no choice but to watch both sides rather sadly continue their violence against each other. But he ends this powerful polemic with six devastating lines: "I who have cursed / The drunken officer of British rule, how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love? / Betray them both, or give back what they give? / How can I face such slaughter and be cool? / How can I turn from Africa and live?" And of course, Walcott has never turned from Africa or gone to live there. He has continued writing and publishing and has, since the 1980s, become famous all over again for an enormous book-long Homeric poem about the islands, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, and the coming together of a multiple of cultural convergences.

Source: David Donnell, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

Jhan Hochman, who holds a Ph.D in English and an M.A. in cinema studies, is the author of Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel, and Theory *(1998). In the following essay Hochman examines the role of animality in "A Far Cry from Africa."*

When most Westerners think of Africa, one of the first things that comes to mind are the animals lions, elephants, zebras, giraffes, rhinos, hyenas. And although the issues of Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" are cultural are concerned with people animals materialize throughout the poem in generally two ways. As kinds, such as flies and ibises, animals are compared similarly to particular groups of people. But as a kingdom, as in "animal kingdom," animals are largely contrasted to humankind, even though Walcott does acknowledge a shared animality.

The opening image of "A Far Cry from Africa" is "A wind . . . ruffling the tawny pelt / Of Africa." A pelt, in this case, most likely refers to the furry or hairy skin of an animal, such as a wild cat, dog, or antelope. Not only is the continent of Africa associated with animals in Walcott's poem, but it is represented as an animal. The specific topography referred to is the "veldt," a Dutch Afrikaans word meaning a field or a flat grassland or prairie with few or no trees. Within this landscape are (as one might expect to find around large animals) insects, specifically flies. The flies Walcott mentions, however, are not really flies, but metaphors for the Kikuyu, a tribal people of Kenya living in the region long before Europeans arrived. This is a controversial metaphor, indeed: likening African tribal people to pesky insects sucking the blood out of Africa.

The metaphor of the Kikuyu as flies is developed further. As flies lay eggs that turn into maggots (Walcott's "worms"), the Kikuyu also brought forth something considered unappealing by Walcott: Mau Mau, a secret terrorist organization. The Kikuyu were an influential people whose economy revolved around agriculture. Their land was increasingly taken by white "settlers" when Britain, in 1895, turned what is now The Republic of Kenya into the East African Protectorate. The Kikuyu were forced off their land and into servitude. Kikuyu anger over this predicament increased and reached its peak with the Mau Mau Uprising against the British regime. Mau Mau began as a militant faction of the Kikuyu, the Kenya Land Freedom Army, and became a secret society bent on expelling the British from Kenya. From 1952 to 1956, it engaged in a bloody terrorist campaign; Mau Mau was infamous for its hackings and mutilations of whites, animals owned by whites, and Kikuyus who refused to join Mau Mau or who collaborated with the British. (Though the British defeated Mau Mau, the country of Kenya earned its independence in 1963 from colonial rule.)

It was reports of this violence that reached other parts of the world and must have appalled Walcott to the extent that he compared Mau Mau to maggots eating away at a field of corpses. One might infer here that Walcott is not just appalled, but ashamed at Mau Mau because he is, himself, part African. His problem is that Mau Mau might synecdochically (in a substitution of part for whole) become all Africans, even all black peoples. Mau Mau became so infamous that it was used as a verb in American slang;

"to Mau Mau," meant to threaten or terrorize. In comparing Mau Mau to maggots, Walcott is distancing himself from Mau Mau and against the synecdoche that Mau Mau equals all black peoples.

The second stanza begins with ibises, large birds related to herons and storks. The ibis was a favorite animal of the ancient Egyptians, becoming not only the incarnation of the god Thoth□patron of astronomers, scribes, magicians, healers, and enchanters□but a bird whose appearance heralded the flooding Nile, the season of fertility. In this stanza, (white) ibises are apparently being hunted by black Africans, which could be read as a metaphor of black Mau Maus "hunting" white estate owners and farmers. Some reading this poem are apt to synecdochically understand the white ibis, intuitively or intellectually, as a good symbol. Once the association is made, whites hunted by Mau Mau can seem blameless, guiltless, and good. Further, calling white ibises inhabitants of Africa since "civilization's dawn," makes it seem as if whites resided in Africa even before the Kikuyu. While the metaphor of "ibis equals white person" may work with the thrust of the poem, it is far too positive an image to represent the whites who took Kenya away from Kenyans.

The third stanza may be read as two comments made by an outsider to the Kenyan conflict that justify complacency. The word "brutish" comes from the Latin *brutus*, meaning heavy, inert, and stupid; it most commonly refers to beasts. Walcott's outsiders to the uprising complacently remark that nothing is to be done since Africans are possessed by "brutish necessity" to wipe their bloody hands upon "napkins of a dirty cause." "Napkins" indicate a "civilized" nicety, and the "dirty cause" of the British is known as the "white man's burden"□ the purported altruistic duty of white people to "civilize" black people. The other comment in this same stanza made by outsiders about the Mau Mau Uprising is: "The gorilla wrestles with the superman." The "gorilla" represents black Africans and the "superman," white Brits. Walcott's outsider considers both sides of the conflict reprehensible: that Africans, like gorillas, are not civilized, and that Brits, like Nietzsche's overweening superman, are too civilized□so arrogant as to think it their destiny to rule the nonwhite world. The speaker of this section apparently wants nothing to do with Africans, Mau Mau, or imperialism. Walcott is disgusted by both views put forth in this stanza, not only because they are distasteful, but because he cannot so easily remove himself from the conflict since he is "poisoned with the blood of both."

Walcott, or the persona of the outsider, has compared people to animals, but, in the second stanza, animals are contrasted with people:

The violence of beast on beast is read
As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain

The "is read" makes the speaker seem just barely willing to go along with the thrust of the first statement. He does seem, however, in agreement with the second idea□that man does indeed seek "his divinity by inflicting pain." With these two thoughts, beasts

come out better than "upright man" since animals do what they must do, and do not seek divinity through inflicting pain.

Although Walcott never solves□within the poem□his problem of loyalty, one thing does look clear-cut: Walcott believes that humans, unlike animals, have no excuse, no attractive rationale, for murdering noncombatants in the Kenyan conflict. While we cannot be sure if Walcott, at this point in his life, was a pacifist, he does make plain in "A Far Cry from Africa" that whatever the rightness of the Mau Mau cause, its mode of operation was shameful. Geographical outsiders might be apt to agree. Still, Mau Mau's swift, rude terror would better represented if juxtaposed against the gnawing, polite oppression of British imperialism. Unfortunately, Walcott only briefly mentions the vivid extremity of British practice ("The drunken officer of British rule" and "dirty cause" do not do justice to the extent of British injustice), making it far easier to condemn Mau Mau. Walcott's dilemma (and the reader's) might have been more righteously diffi- cult had the poem added a few stanzas condemning the British. Instead, Walcott displaces a political situation in which large numbers of people suffered and died to the "action" inside himself□personal shame and confusion. In the process of shaming Mau Mau by claiming its members do not even measure up to animals, both Mau Mau and animals are demeaned. At the end of "A Far Cry from Africa," Walcott appears as torn about his identity as both animal and human as his identity as both African and European.

Source: Jhan Hochman, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #4

Aviya Kushner, who is the poetry editor for Neworld Renaissance Magazine, *earned an M.A. in creative writing from Boston University, where she studied under Walcott, among others. In the following essay, Kushner analyzes "A Far Cry from Africa" as the speaker's quest self-description.*

Island boy. That's how Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott often describes himself, in both his poems and his conversation. However, that simple self-portrait can be misleading. At best, it's only part of the story of a man whose wanderings have produced rich, skillful, multilayered poems that draw on the poetic tradition of many nations, ranging from modern England, Russia, and Spain to ancient Greece.

Of course, the island bit has some truth to it. Walcott is a major English-language writer who was born□and still lives, for part of the year□in the multilingual Caribbean. His accent and warm manners are from the tiny, tourist-attracting island of St. Lucia, but his heroes in both his reading and writing have taken him far past the sunny, postcard blue-and-green Caribbean landscape.

Walcott's historical conscience also extends far past the island's borders, and his readers live all over the world. Walcott is so admired in England that he was mentioned in leading newspapers as a possible candidate for the position of Poet Laureate when Ted Hughes died. For a son of the colonies, being named England's chief poet would certainly be an impressive turn of events. But that irony of personal success amid his native country's history as a conquered land has not been lost on Walcott. His precarious perch between two cultures has become a key subject for him.

In fact, this lifelong conflict between his tiny native island and the wider world, between his love of English and his knowledge that it is the colonizer's tongue and the oppressor's language□and thus part of its power□is a factor in the depth and strength of Walcott's poems.

Many poems are built on ambivalence, and "A Far Cry from Africa" is an example of how a masterful poet can mold ambivalence into art. In this poem, Walcott extends his ambivalence about the English language and the heritage it bears to everything□meter, subject matter, and even the choice of English as a language to write in. While the poem starts off in the iambic pentameter Walcott has mastered□the bread and butter of poetry in English□the poem soon veers course metrically, just as it changes place, perspective, and point of view. Like ownership of countries and empires, everything here is subject to change.

Much of the poem can be read in more than one way, starting with the title. At first glance, if "a far cry" is read as "a subject far removed from daily reality," "A Far Cry from Africa" is a title that might apply to most of Walcott's work. With a few exceptions, he is not influenced by the sound or tradition of Africa, but rather the titans of Western poetry. Personally close to Russian-born Joseph Brodsky and Canadian-born Mark Strand, a

deep admirer of Britons Edward Thomas and W. H. Auden and Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, Walcott frequently writes homages to his favorite writers. African writers, however, rarely figure among Walcott's models.

But the "far cry" of the title can also be taken literally, as simply a cry from a far place. This is supported by the poem's opening lines, which detail human misery and the cries that must come with it. The phrase then leads into a questioning of colonization and the pain it has brought. The poem subsequently details a deep, personal division that is paralleled by the double meanings of the title and much of the poem. As the poem progresses, it questions itself, and it ends in a series of questions.

This division mirrors the speaker's feelings about Britain's colonization of so many countries. Despite the violence, Walcott the poet cannot fully condemn the colonizers because he has taken so much from them. His vocation□English□comes from the colonizer, and yet, as a moral human being, he feels he must condemn colonization.

Naturally, this produces an inner division. By the final passages, the rumbling references to a divided self have reached a shriek. This division is the heart of the poem, but it is only clear at the end. Therefore, all of the stanzas fall more easily into place if they are read as steps to the crucial line in the last stanza: "I who am poisoned with the blood of both / Where should I turn, divided to the vein?"

Now it makes sense to return to the beginning. Every word in the poem is part of the step-by-step march to that deafening moment of self-division at the end. The poem starts with a personification of the entire continent, and this speaker-Africa parallel continues to some extent throughout. For a poem that moves to the grandiose, its first step looks modest: "A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt / Of Africa." But like Walcott's characterization of himself as merely "a man who loved islands," this first line is misleadingly simple. A trip to the dictionary is one way to uncover the layers of the poem.

The word "pelt" is normally defined as the skin of an animal (with fur or hair still on it), and so the opening line compares the continent to an animal, with "tawny pelt" possibly evoking the color of the African desert. But there's more. "Pelt" can also be human skin, and here, the wind is ruffling the pelt of a person. What seems modest is actually horribly frightening. Finally, "pelt" as a verb means "to strike," an image that begins a few lines later.

In the second line, the pace quickens. "Kikuyu, quick as flies, / Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt." After the confident iambics of the first line and a half (trademark Walcott), the poem draws on alliteration, forsaking meter as primary device for other poetic tools. The alliteration of "Kikuyu/ quick" and "batten/bloodstreams" physically speeds up the poem; the action parallels the sound. Kikuyu are indigenous African people, and here they are rushing to feed upon the streams of blood in the level grassland of the continent. In this landscape, people feed off people. This is a ghastly paradise, populated with scattered corpses.

Amid all of the hubbub, the smallest of creatures the wormwily and slinky, loudly warns those who would be compassionate. Walcott injects some humor into the gruesome scene, with the characterization "colonel of carrion" depicting the worm as king of those who prey on flesh. Suddenly, Walcott takes us out of this frightening, jumbled-up world and anchors it in "statistics" and "scholars" who try to justify colonial policy. Once again using alliteration to point to a turn in the poem, the speaker puts the spotlight on those who write and think but don't really look at a hacked child or a dead savage rotting in the desert.

The reference to "statistics" and "scholars" borrows from W. H. Auden's famous poem "The Fall of Rome," in which an "unimportant clerk" writes "I DO NOT LIKE MY WORK" on a pink official form. Here, too, Walcott mixes the fall of an empire with a humorous jab at bureaucrats and their statistics.

Apart from that slight tangent for some humor, stanza one sticks to its missionto set a scene. It also shows off some poetic gymnastics, pushing alliteration and rhyme as far as they can go. Slant rhymes such as "pelt/veldt" and "flies/paradise" share space with conventional rhymes such as "bed/ dead." Most important in its role of scene-setting, the first stanza ends with questions, which are integral to this poem. Just as the title proclaims "A Far Cry from Africa" and then the first line proceeds to set a scene in Africa, the questions announce that the poem will offer a far cry from answers. This is a poem about far cries, about divisions of the self, a gulf as wide as a continent all contained within one man.

While the first two lines of stanza one were all iambs, for a lulling, ta-tum sound, the second stanza begins quite differently. Instead of a light ruffling, there is the loud "Threshed by beaters, the long rushes break." The plants that are used for mats or furniture bottoms are literally broken by beaters, which are revolving cylinders that chop up stalks or brush. "Beaters" also recalls "to beat" or "to conquer," a major theme of the poem. This technique of a noun that also resonates as a verb was seen earlier with the word "pelt."

Once again, as in the first stanza, sound is king. "Threshed" is a single, forceful syllable, placing a clear stress on the stanza's first word. "Rush" and "break" reinforce the sensation of power and violence. The speaker is getting ready to roll out some grand ideas, with that kind of drumbeat sound. And so "have wheeled since civilization's dawn" does not come as a huge surprise. The phrase "civilization's dawn" lets the poem shift from a scene in Africa to a rumination on the world itselfto the history of man.

"Civilization's dawn" also recalls the Bible's book of Genesis, which is why the poem's quiet opening followed by loud, active rumbling seems so familiar. In the next few lines, Walcott takes that opening image of paradise marred by violence coupled with a personal conflict and expands it into a tale of humanitya sorry story repeated throughout human history:

The violence of beast upon beast is read
As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain

While English naturalist Charles Darwin may have proclaimed survival of the fittest as natural law, and while in the creation story God may have granted animals to men to eat, the speaker here sees man as a conqueror attempting to mimic God. According to the Biblical story, God has power over all things, including, of course, the power to give life. Man can be God-like by literally lording power over his fellow man. The speaker here questions the wisdom of having mere people possess so much power over their fellow men.

The next stanza begins with another shake to the reader and another powerhouse image□"brutish necessity" wiping its hands "upon the napkin of a dirty cause." The word "Again" signals the stanza will continue what the other stanzas have done. As we have seen, each stanza's first few words are crucial to the poem's overall structure, and this stanza is no exception.

"Again" means that this story has happened many times over, and the repetitive questions at the end reinforce the feeling of a cycle. These are questions the speaker has asked himself many times before. This is a story of conquest and divided loyalties that snakes back to the Bible, and later, to the great empires that rose and fell and figure so prominently in Walcott's work. Here, for example, Walcott deliberately alludes to the Bible and mentions Spain. ("A waste of our compassion, as with Spain . . .") Finally, like the earliest Greek epic poets, Walcott is fascinated by senseless brutality of man over man and how even great humans are tripped up by their simple human nature.

These grand ideas should not distract from the tools of poetry that are used here, since they point to meaning. The careful rhyme throughout the poem is especially important as the ending nears. The "flies/ paradise" lines that came early on have already focused a spotlight on line endings, and the last few create an interesting juxtaposition of "live" and "love." The speaker seems to be realizing that how he lives and what he loves are not compatible. Though his elegant, Westernized lines that draw on the classical epic and lyric traditions are indeed "a far cry from Africa," Walcott nevertheless realizes that his life□what makes him live□is wider than the Western canon. He must address those close to him who are struggling to live. He cannot turn from Africa, despite all the years, the accolades, and the devotion to its oppressors' tongue.

And so, in this poem that evokes a continent, a world, and an entire history of the world in four stanzas, the speaker faces Africa and uses its desert and its violence as a means of looking at himself. The only conclusions he reaches, however, are a series of questions. All of the violence and selfdivision reach an intense pitch with those final questions:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?

I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

Fittingly, the poem ends in the word "live." For this speaker, questioning and living are one and the same. Forming questions into art□in perfectly controlled lines, displaying all of poetry's power□ is how this poet approaches a crisis of identity. Somehow, a speaker nearly ripped apart by inner conflict produces a poem that races up and down but, in the end, seems overwhelmingly whole. Despite the questions, the mission of self-description within the context of history is accomplished.

Source: Aviya Kushner, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #5

Winters is a freelance writer who has written for a wide variety of academic and educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses issues of race and heritage in "A Far Cry from Africa."

In "A Far Cry from Africa," Walcott writes about the bloody war of African against European during the Mau Mau Rebellion, when members of local tribes, particularly the Kikuyu, rebelled against the British seizure of their land. The poem opens with graphic lines describing the blood and brutality of conflict; as if these descriptions were not enough, Walcott makes it clear that this is an unnecessary war, describing it as "a dirty cause."

Walcott saw his own life mirrored in this larger conflict, because he was of mixed African and European ancestry and thus felt an ancestral connection of loyalty to both sides involved in the conflict. As he writes in the poem,

I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where
shall I turn, divided to the vein? / I who have cursed /
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose /
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?

The outer war brings up an inner paradox: how could Walcott, who is part of both sides, choose sides? How can one man fight himself? It's impossible, and he seems to be using this fact as a way of saying that all of humanity is one□these race wars and ethnic conflicts are as futile as one man fighting against himself would be. He sees the falseness of this "dirty cause"□the British propaganda that violence against the Mau Mau is a noble cause, while African violence is viewed as "animal" and the Africans themselves as "savages" and "expendable."

Despite the fact that the Kikuyu were right to be angered over British colonialism, however, Walcott could not condone the violence they used to achieve their goals, nor could he condone the colonialism and subsequent bloody acts of the British even though he loved their language and art. He does not, and will not, take sides; he cannot reduce the conflict to a simple "right versus wrong," or even to a metaphorical or actual "black-and-white" problem, with clear answers. There is no solution: both sides are wrong, both sides are right, and Walcott as observer has compassion for them both, as he has compassion for himself as a child of both sides.

The poem is one of the first in which Walcott began exploring the implications of his mixed heritage; it was published in his first collection of poems, *In a Green Night*, in 1962. Since then, many critics have remarked on Walcott's use of traditions from both sides of his ancestry, and the cultures he has inherited from both sides of his family, in his work. Peter Balakian wrote of "A Far Cry from Africa" in *Poetry* that Walcott's "ability to embrace his Black West Indian identity and to accept, with the ingenuity of an artist, the language of his inherited culture accounts for much of the genius and richness of his

idiom. Using the English tongue he loves does not preclude his moral outrage at the crimes that the Empire has committed against his people."

Walcott epitomizes the mixed heritage of the Caribbean□born on the island of St. Lucia, with African, Dutch, and English ancestors, he spoke a local Creole dialect at home, but in school learned to speak formal English and read the classics of British literature. On both his mother's and father's sides, he had a white grandfather and a black grandmother. According to Mark A. McWatt in *Third World Quarterly,* Walcott was aware from a very young age of this split; Walcott said, "In that simple, schizophrenic boyhood one could lead two lives: the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect." Walcott's ancestry epitomized the larger racial and ethnic composition of the Caribbean islands, and he has often called himself a "divided child" because even as a youth, he was aware of the contradictions he embodied.

Walcott loved the English literature he read at school, and its power and beauty filled him with the ambition to write about his Caribbean home and fill it with the same kind of power and life. Even as he was thrilled by the English language, however, he was aware that the British had brought slavery and slaves to the Caribbean, including some of his ancestors. This ambivalence about his heritage would stay with him for decades and would constitute a major theme in his writings, including "A Far Cry from Africa."

As Robert D. Hamner noted in *Derek Walcott,* Walcott "is a living example of the divided loyalties and hatreds that keep his society suspended between two worlds." But as Walcott makes clear in "A Far Cry from Africa," Caribbean society is not the only one touched by these conflicts: they occur in Africa, in America, anywhere there is oppression and racism. As Hamner wrote, because of Walcott's awareness of the paradoxes in his heritage, "inevitable questions of origins, identity, and the creation of meaningful order in a chaotic world lead Walcott to themes that transcend race, place, and time."

Racial conflict, and the conflicts associated with it throughout history□conflicts between master and slave, colonizer and colonized□have been a constant theme in Walcott's work since the publication of "A Far Cry from Africa." More than any other poet, he epitomizes and embodies the forces that shaped the new world□every country in the western hemisphere has been shaped by the flowing- together of races, but this fact is often ignored by other writers. Many of Walcott's other poems, for example "The Schooner Flight." feature people of mixed race. In that poem, a mariner from Trinidad, who is very similar to Walcott, describes his mixed English, African, and Dutch ancestry, and says, "either I'm nobody or I'm a nation."

In a 1977 interview with Edward Hirsch, reprinted in William Baer's *Conversations with Derek Walcott,* the poet made it clear that he was still thinking about the issues brought up in "A Far Cry from Africa." Walcott told Hirsch, "There is no West Indian who is black, or even one who is not black, who is not aware of the existence of Africa in all of us. . . . The fact is that every West Indian has been severed from a continent, whether he is Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, or black. . . . It would be equally abhorrent to me to say 'I wish we were English again.' The reality is that one has to build in the West Indies." In

other words, to live with all facets of one's heritage, not denying them, not elevating one over the other.

Not everyone is as comfortable as Walcott with the racial paradoxes of his heritage and of the real world; as a result, throughout his writing career, critics have sought to label him in narrower ways than he himself is comfortable with. Because he is a very cosmopolitan, cultured poet who is black, he has been both praised and blamed not so much for his writing as for his race. Some white critics have patronizingly thought him amazing because he is so articulate, and some black critics have accused him of sounding too white and betraying black sensibility. For example, McWatt wrote that the Nobelprize- winning poet Joseph Brodsky believes that describing Walcott as a "West Indian poet" or "a black poet from the Caribbean" does not do him justice. Rather, Brodsky prefers to think of Walcott as "the great poet of the English language."

Regarding his place in literature, Walcott feels differently. He told Edward Hirsch in the *Paris Review,* "I am primarily, absolutely a Caribbean writer. The English language is nobody's special property. It is the property of the imagination: it is the property of the language itself. I have never felt inhibited in trying to write as well as the greatest English poets. Now that has led to a lot of provincial criticism: the Caribbean critic may say, 'You are trying to be English,' and the English critic may say, 'Welcome to the club.' These are two provincial statements at either end of the spectrum."

As in the poem, where he refuses to settle for an easy answer and embraces both sides, painful though that may be, Walcott has chosen to embrace the whole of his heritage. As Robert D. Hamner noted in *Derek Walcott,* "As inheritor of two vitally rich cultures, he utilizes one, then the other, and finally creates out of the two his own personalized style." In the interview with Hirsch, Walcott said, "Once I knew that the richness of Creole was a whole uncharted territory for a writer, I became excited." And, he said, "I have always locked in on the fact that there is a living tradition around me, a tradition of chanting, of oral theater in terms of storytelling and the enjoyment of rhetoric. I was lucky to be born as a poet in a tradition that uses poetry as demonstration, as theater. . . . The chant, the response, and the dance are immediate things to me: they are not anachronistic or literary."

Source: Kelly Winters, in a essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #6

Paul Witcover is a novelist and editor in New York City with an M.A. in creative writing and literature from the City University of New York. In the following essay, he discusses the personal and the political in Derek Walcott's poem, "A Far Cry from Africa."

In his 1993 critical biography, *Derek Walcott*, Robert D. Hamner observes, "It is not a simple choice between cultures for Walcott, but a matter of laying claim to his mixed heritage." This "mixed heritage," which the Swedish Academy, in awarding Walcott the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992, referred to as "the complexity of his own situation," takes a variety of often-paradoxical forms. For example, Walcott is of both English and African genetic ancestry. The blood of colonizers and colonized, oppressors and oppressed, flows in his veins. Culturally, too, he is a hybrid. As a native of St. Lucia, a small island in the Lesser Antilles, Walcott grew up immersed in West Indian culture, yet received a thorough English-style education, including exposure to the European literary tradition which soon fired his own ambitions as poet and playwright□ambitions further complicated by a linguistic inheritance including English, French, and Creole patois.

Although Walcott has long since incorporated the tug-of-war of these competing traditions, expectations, and loyalties into his mature verse and drama, successfully "laying claim to his mixed heritage" and forging it into something wholly his own, his early work reflects the personal, political, and poetic struggles of an extraordinarily gifted young writer faced with a variety of difficult, urgent choices, none of which seems fully satisfying. "A Far Cry from Africa," written in 1957, is exemplary in these respects.

The title is a pun alluding to the poet's dilemma of divided loyalties. It refers to a cry coming from faraway Africa which the poet nevertheless hears all too clearly, but it also states, through the ironic, selfmocking use of the colloquial expression "a far cry from," that the poet, despite his sympathy to that distant cry, is far from Africa in more than just a geographical sense. Walcott is almost obsessively drawn to such tangled conundrums of identity and language. In his best work, like the book-length epic poem *Omeros*, these questions are examined with the highest literary artistry and a profoundly moral, though never simplistically judgmental, intelligence.

"A Far Cry from Africa" was occasioned by events taking place in the country of Kenya, which at the time was a British colony. Following World War II, a veritable epidemic of independence movements swept Africa and Asia as places like Kenya, long under the political, military, and economic yoke of European countries, sought the basic freedoms of self-governance. It is a tragic fact of history that many of these movements were marked on both sides by extremes of violence, and such was the case in Kenya. There, the majority tribe, the Kikuyu, under the leadership of the charismatic Jomo Kenyatta, stood at the forefront of anti-British rebellion. Even so, many Kikuyu sided with the British, who exploited tribal differences in a classic strategy of "divide and conquer." As civil war spread, the British sought to demonize the rebels by attributing the worst excesses of the fighting to the soldiers of a secret society called the Mau Mau. Historians generally agree that there was no such secret society. The Mau Mau were a

fabrication invented for international public relations purposes, to justify the harshly repressive tactics employed by the British and their tribal allies in putting down the rebellion. Ironically, however, certain rebel factions seized the opportunity to use the widespread panic engendered by this propaganda to their own advantage. A secret society calling itself the Mau Mau emerged as if out of the worst nightmares of the British Empire and proceeded to cast a bloody pall of terrorism over the war-torn country. In the process, they gave the conflict the name by which it became known to history: the Mau Mau Rebellion. By the time the rebellion was crushed in the late 1950s, more than 11,000 rebels had been killed and 80,000 Kikuyu herded into camps. Despite the propaganda of the British, only 32 white civilians were killed in the rebellion, and the total number of European deaths in combat did not greatly exceed 100. Jomo Kenyatta ultimately served as an independent Kenya's first president.

For Walcott, the Mau Mau Rebellion, pitting Africans against British, is a metaphor for his own psychological and cultural conflict, a conflict neatly summed up in the last eight lines of the poem: "I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein? / I who have cursed / The drunken officer of British rule, how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love? / Betray them both, or give back what they give? / How can I face such slaughter and be cool? / How can I turn from Africa and live?"

The answers Walcott ultimately found to these questions lie beyond the scope of this essay. What is important to note here is the artistry and anguished emotion with which the young poet raises his questions, as well as the mingling of the personal and the political in almost every line. The poem is divided into three stanzas of 10, 11, and 12 lines, respectively. The majority of these lines are of ten syllables, in the meter known as iambic pentameter, which has been called the natural rhythm of the English language. Iambic pentameter simply means a line of Five (penta) metric "feet" (units of two or three syllables) whose stresses (or accents) most often follow the pattern of light-heavy, light-heavy, etc. Of the eight lines quoted above, six are in iambic pentameter. The sonnets of William Shakespeare feature some of the most beautiful uses of iambic pentameter in the English language, but even colloquial speech, if written down and parsed, will often work out to be iambic pentameter.

Indeed, Walcott is consciously alluding to the sonnet form in this poem, although he has adapted it, cut it down□even, one might say, done violence to it, suiting the form to its violent subject matter. There are many different kinds of sonnets: the Petrarchan, the Shakespearean, the Miltonic, to name but a few. All are characterized by distinctive rhyme schemes and lengths, though in most cases the convention of fourteen iambic pentameter lines is maintained. Walcott has introduced variation in meter, rhyme scheme, and length. Moreover, a sonnet is a poem meant to stand alone, to be complete in itself (although sonnet sequences are not uncommon), but Walcott makes each stanza of his poem into a kind of quasi-sonnet. Thus, while the poem as a whole is not a sonnet, it is put together with the stuff of sonnets, as if the stones from an ancient but tumbled cathedral had been used to build an edifice whose origins remained noticeable but whose purpose was entirely different. It is a display of breathtaking virtuosity and confidence, but the poet's purpose is more than simply to show off his

mastery of English verse forms and traditions. As mentioned above, Walcott does violence to the traditional sonnet form in order to mirror the violence of his two subjects: the war between Afri can and European going on in Kenya, and the similar struggle going on within the soul of the poet between "this Africa and the English tongue I love."

Walcott compares Africa to an animal, perhaps a lion. It possesses a "tawny pelt," and the veldt, a word meaning grassland, is likened to the bloodstream. Contrast this with the image of the Kikuyu introduced in line 2: "Kikuyu, quick as flies, / Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt." In the poet's extended metaphor, Africa is a beautiful animal, while the Africans living there are little more than blood-sucking insects. Africa may be "a paradise," but if so, it is a paradise strewn with corpses. What or who is responsible? While statisticians and scholars argue over "the salients of colonial policy," the poet rejects such inquiry as useless. "What is that to the white child hacked in bed? / To savages, expendable as Jews?" The unblinking ferocity of these two lines is shocking. The butchery of an innocent white child by natives is equated to the attitude of hypocritical whites who, despite professing horror and revulsion at the Holocaust, treat Africans analogously to the Nazi extermination of Jews.

There are no good guys here. Only vast and ancient Africa, symbolizing the natural world where violence is not evil but simply an inevitable result of evolution, and the Europeans and Africans who see themselves as superior to nature, representatives of competing civilizations both of which mock the beauty and purity of nature with their murderous ways. "The violence of beast on beast is read / As natural law, but upright man / Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain." Walcott, sickened by the spectacle as "the gorilla wrestles with the superman," would turn away, but cannot, for he carries that same grotesque wrestling match in his own bloodstream, in his own brain. Africa, the mother country, and English, the mother tongue, call to him with equal force, demanding he choose between them. He knows he cannot choose one or the other. Nor can he reject both. The litany of questions, posed as paradoxes, that constitutes the final eight lines of the poem poignantly and powerfully express the poet's existential dilemma, a dilemma that remains unresolved. Yet in the structure of the poem, Walcott has already begun to answer these questions by taking what is worthwhile from mother country and mother tongue and blending them into something that is both and neither. "Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" The answer, perhaps still unconscious, is nevertheless plain: to poetry.

Source: Paul Witcover, in a essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Adaptations

Bill Moyers interviewed Walcott, primarily on the subject of empire, for his *A World of Ideas,* released by PBS videos in 1987.

A cassette titled *Derek Walcott Reads* (1994) is available from Harper Collins.

Compare and Contrast

1958-64: This period of civil war in Africa's largest country, Sudan, comes to an end in the October, 1964 revolution when a student is shot and killed. A general strike and protests bring down the military junta.

1999: CBS News reports that slavery is "alive and well in Sudan." Islamic groups, taking only women and children of the Dinka tribe in raids, use them as sexual servants, housekeepers, and farmhands. Dinka slaves are sold for about $50, the price of a goat.

1962: The long, immensely expensive Ethiopian- Eritrean War (1962-1991) begins after Ethiopia cancels Eritrean autonomy within the Ethiopian- Eritrean federation, in effect since 1952.

1999: In January, Eritrean news reports that 243 Eritreans are rounded up, jailed, and deported from Ethiopia. To date 49,500 Eritreans have been deported from Ethiopia.

1962: Civil war begins in Rwanda (1962-63), as Tutsi military forces try to gain control of the new country after the majority Hutus had won control in free elections.

1998: In Rwanda, during the course of the year, 864 people are tried for the 1994 genocide in which between five hundred thousand and one million are slaughtered in the Hutu government's attempt to wipe out the Tutsi minority. Civil war follows the 1994 genocide, and the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front defeat the Rwandan military, which, with an estimated two million Hutus, flee Rwanda into neighboring countries.

What Do I Read Next?

The anthology *Modern African Poetry* (1984), edited by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, includes poems by sixty-four poets from twenty-four African nations, including three poets from Kenya of the same generation as Walcott.

Orientalism (1979) by Edward Said is a pioneering work in postcolonial studies. Although it mostly centers on the Muslim world (including North Africa), the book is a must for the student wanting to understand the roots of Western imperialism as its ideas were disseminated through intellectual practice.

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (1994), a text of multicultural media studies, links the often separated studies of race and identity politics on the one hand, and on the other, third-world nationalism and (post)colonial discourses.

Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak's *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, and Dialogues* (1990) speaks to questions of representation and self-representation, the situations of postcolonial critics, pedagogical responsibility, and political strategies.

Further Study

Baer, William, ed., *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, University Press of Mississippi, 1996.

This text contains eighteen interviews spanning the period from 1966 to 1993. Also included is a good bio-chronology of Walcott's life.

Balakian, Peter, "The Poetry of Derek Walcott," in *Poetry*, June, 1986, pp. 169-77.

Balakian comments on Walcott's *Collected Poems, 1948-1984.*

Breslin, Paul, "I Met History Once, But He Ain't Recognize Me: The Poetry of Derek Walcott," in *Tri Quarterly*, Winter, 1987, pp. 168-83.

Breslin reflects on Walcott's career and work.

Dickey, James, "The Worlds of Cosmic Castaway," in *New York Times Book Review*, February 2, 1986, p. 8.

Dickey reviews Walcott's *Collected Poems, 1948-1984.*

Grant, Nellie, *Nellie's Story*, William Morrow, 1981.

For those wanting a firsthand account of what it was like to be a white farmer in Kenya during the period of 1933 to 1977, this is a valuable text.

Hamner, Robert D., ed., *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, Three Continents Press, 1993.

These 52 essays, eight of which are by Walcott, present an exhaustive compendium of commentary on Walcott's life and works.

Hirsch, Edward, "An Interview," in *Paris Review*, Winter, 1986, pp. 197-230.

Hirsch's conversation with Walcott provides fascinating insight into Walcott's background and childhood, as well as his writing.

Hirsch, Edward, "An Interview with Derek Walcott," in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, edited by William Baer, University Press of Mississippi, 1996, pp. 50-63.

Hirsch and Walcott converse about the author's poetry, prose, and plays, and his heritage as a West Indian.

Huxley, Elspeth, compiler, *Nine Faces of Kenya*, Viking, 1991.

For firsthand accounts by both blacks and whites who lived in Kenya during Mau Mau, this is an excellent source. The book is divided into themes: Exploration, Travel, Settlers, Wars, Environment, Wildlife, Hunting, Lifestyles, Legend, and Poetry.

McWatt, Mark A., "Derek Walcott: An Island Poet and His Sea," in *Third World Quarterly*, October, 1988, pp. 1607-15.

McWatt examines Walcott's place in Caribbean literature and Walcott's theme of artistic isolation.

Walcott, Derek, *Collected Poems: 1948-1984*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986.

This collection contains "A Far Cry from Africa" and 135 other poems, from Walcott's first major books, *In a Green Night* to *Midsummer*.

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Delf, George, *Jomo Kenyatta: Towards the Light of Truth*, Doubleday, 1961.

Hamner, Robert D., *Derek Walcott*, Twayne, 1993.

Hamner, Robert, D., ed., *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, Three Continents, 1993.

King, Bruce, "West Indies II: Walcott, Brathwaite, and Authenticity," in *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World*, St. Martins, 1980, pp. 118-39.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LDNfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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