



EAST – WEST CULTURAL PASSAGE

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**Space as Metaphor for Circumscription:
A Reading of Fugard's *Valley Song***

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ABSTRACT

Space, to a very great extent, contributes to the sense individuals make of their being by way of negotiation with the available elements and the indexes it offers. However, the space occupied at a point in time could be defined by externally propelled socio-political factors. In keeping with his concern for mostly the unfortunate mass of the people living in South Africa, Athol Fugard explores the metaphor of the valley in order to expose the inhibitions placed on individuals; he also reveals their hopes, fears and dreams, reflective of the new South Africa. Apart from being used as spatial temporality, space is also used in the text, metaphorically, to mark the gulf that exists between two individuals, held apart by age difference. With an admixture of fantasy, hallucination and desire, Fugard interrogates the trend of change in the new South Africa and its accompanying fears, dreams, hopes and worries. This paper, therefore, takes a cursory look at how Fugard dramatically and eclectically investigates the lives of the people in the new South Africa by exploring how novel boundaries are used to establish social and economic borders, most especially between some of the people who still inhabit the valley, leaving us with a revelation of what is being done, and a prognosis of what could be done, to achieve genuine renewal. The paper reveals that although the new democratic order allows for newness in rulership, the same could not be said of the condition of the numerous masses that have experienced little or no change.

KEYWORDS: Athol Fugard, space and spatiality, circumscription, deprivation, apartheid and post-apartheid, binaries, chimera

The Rhythm of History and Contemporary African Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary African poetry and history continue to meet at a variety of points, depending on the political climate of the time. The subject matter of African poetry is, therefore, socially conditioned hence African poetry does not only form a continuum in recreating the African experience, it equally captures Africa's historical burdens, if appraised from an historical context; the genre continues to be poignantly political because of the changing pulse of Africa's political history. The thrust of this paper is therefore, essentially bi-focal; it will appraise the nature and function of literature and history with special reference to the way in which history continues to shape and redesign contemporary African poetry. The paper also attempts to situate contemporary African poetry relative to specific historical labels in order to make glaring the generational gap easily discernable in the thematic thrusts of poetry. A close reading of African poetry will no doubt make evident that poetry in Africa bears witness to the continent's socio-political and economic experience.

KEYWORDS: African poetry, political history, socio-cultural conflicts, resistance, poetic language and message, alter-native poetic tradition

Back to the Caribbean: V.S. Naipaul's Portrayal of Colonial Trauma in *The Middle Passage* and *A House for Mr. Biswas*

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ABSTRACT

A writer's vision of himself is of major importance in the development of his career. The fact that Naipaul sees himself as belonging to two worlds, the place of his origins and his self-chosen place of residence, has direct bearing on his attitude to his subjects. Naipaul valorizes his allegedly 'in-between consciousness' that comes with this precarious situatedness and accentuates his 'exilic consciousness' that accompanies it. He also attests that his ambivalent status as an insider/outsider in relation to the First and the Third World alike enables him to entertain a critical distance vis-a-vis his subjects and thus render his work with a unique cultural authority. Yet Naipaul's professional output belies such an unproblematic dismissal of subjectivity. Rather, a close examination of Naipaul's work proves that the writer's perception of the world as reflected in his fiction and non-fiction is deeply subjective. In what follows, I will be examining how Naipaul's subjectivity infiltrates and colors his portrayal of the Caribbean in his travel book *The Middle Passage* (1962) and his universally acclaimed novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). Although both books were written in the 'early phase' of his career and therefore lack the darker pessimism of his later work, they still carry the seeds of Naipaul's subsequent evolution as a man and as a writer. They also foreground perhaps the most significant theme that pervades Naipaul's *oeuvre*: colonial trauma.

KEYWORDS: V.S. Naipaul, colonialism, postcolonialism, the Caribbean, colonial trauma, cultural authenticity, travel narratives

**East-West Encounters across Narrative Boundaries
in Salman Rushdie's *Enchantress of Florence***

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses Salman Rushdie's latest novel, *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), focusing on its philosophical content, its narrative structure and the way it blurs the boundaries between levels of reality – both within the fictional universe projected by the text and within the text itself as a multi-layered narrative construction. *The Enchantress of Florence* brings back to life two historical worlds – Renaissance Florence and Mughal India – at a time when they were becoming aware of each other and when the migration of people and ideas between them was becoming possible. In each world, there is one character (in each case, a transworld-identical character – Akbar the Great and Niccolo 'il Machia') that represents that world's moral centre, and between them there seems to be an unlikely exchange of ideas across space and time – made possible by an ingenious use of *metalepsis* (i.e. the crossing of boundaries between different narrative levels) – which, nevertheless, convincingly proves the novel's thesis: that the humanist ideas that emerged in the West (the idea of individual freedom, of religious tolerance, of man being at the centre of things, etc) also developed, in "a slightly different form," in the East.

KEYWORDS: novel of ideas, narrative levels, levels of reality, border-crossing, the marvelous, mythic belief.

**Tragedy in the Absence of Gods: A Study of
*The Bikoroa Plays***

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ABSTRACT

John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's *The Bikoroa Plays* is a trilogy set in Bikoroa, a Nigerian community in the Niger Delta area. It tells the tragic story of the Bradide family and their descendants to the second generation. Each of the plays in the trilogy (*The Boat*, *The Return Home* and *Full Circle*) dramatizes a domestic conflict that ends in disaster. The plays are rooted in the African dramatic tradition, and consequently they contain instances of rituals, sacrifice, songs and dance as well as reflect the belief in the ancestors, the gods, predestination and Fate. In addition, the playwright has incorporated into the plays some features of the classical tragic vision, most of which are similar to traditional African models. Through their utterances and actions, a number of characters in the plays create the impression that the tragic events which occur in the Bradide family result from an inherited curse or inscrutable destiny. Critic Nwachukwu-Agbada is, to some extent, tempted to think along this line. However, this essay undertakes a close study of the plays from a more modern position. The quest for money and the struggle for economic survival are the major problems around which the action of each of the plays revolves, and consequently, they are the main causes of the conflicts in the family. The behaviour of some of the characters, mainly the protagonists, is obviously a contributing factor. Thus, the essay argues that the domestic problems dramatized in the trilogy emanate, not from unseen forces, but from contemporary social pressures, and are exacerbated by flaws in the human character.

KEYWORDS: African culture, African dramatic tradition, family drama, spirituality, religious ceremonies, tragedy, classical, traditional, feud, curse, predestination, character, socio-economic, modernist.

**Evoking the Ruins:
Representations of Berlin in Ian McEwan's *The Innocent***

BY MONICA COJOCARU
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ABSTRACT

The paper is a close reading of the spatial and temporal representations of Berlin in Ian McEwan's *The Innocent*, which portrays the city as a significant changing point of convergence in history. Set against the backdrop of Cold War Berlin, the novel interrogates the relationship between present and traumatic past, between remembering and forgetting. The palimpsestic, history-laden Berlin it depicts serves as a symbolic map against which to read and interpret history, the author inviting his readers to re-examine the importance of personal and collective memory and to re-evaluate the past in light of the present through the imaginative rewriting of history.

KEYWORDS: Ian McEwan, *The Innocent*, Berlin, the city, maps, violence, dismemberment, remembrance, reconciliation