

Module 1

Autobiographical Writings and Memoirs

EXCERPTS FROM MEMOIRS

Pablo Neruda

Introduction

Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto (Pablo Neruda), the Chilean poet and diplomat was born on 12th July 1904 in Parral, Chile. He was Chile's most beloved poet. Neruda was a staunch supporter of the Communist Party and a great admirer of Joseph Stalin, Fulgenico Batista and Fidel Castro. His father was employed in the railway and his mother was a teacher. He began his creative writing at the age of 13. In 1920 he contributed his articles and poems to journals adopting the pen name Pablo Neruda which was chosen in honour of the Czech poet Jan Neruda, owing to his father's disapproval of his poetic interests.

Some of his major literary works are *Residence on Earth*, *Canto General*, *Twenty love Poems and a Song of Despair*, *Pain in my Heart* and *Then Come Back: the Lost Neruda*. With the publication of his most renowned literary work *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, Neruda won considerable fame. His books and poetry were published in Germany, Czechoslovakia, China, Denmark, Hungary, the United States, the Soviet Union, Mexico, Cuba, Columbia, Guatemala and Argentina. Between 1927 and 1935 the government assigned him a number of honorary consulships to Burma, Ceylon, Java, Singapore,

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Barcelona, Madrid and Mexico. The turning point of his life came with his duty in Spain. His friendship with leading Spanish literary figures like Federico García Lorca led him to support the Republican group during the Spanish civil war and with this began his left wing association. Neruda was horrified at the civil and military brutalities which followed General Franco's invasion of Spain which reinforced his political commitment and his later alignment with the Communist Party. He wrote *Canto General*, a collection of poems in 1950 exclusively for the workers and the politically oppressed. *Canto General* also celebrates the Latin American heritage of Neruda.

Neruda expressed enormous satisfaction in that he could make people respect the occupation of the poet. In 1950 Neruda visited Delhi for an interview with Jawaharlal Nehru. His poetry appeared in Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. In 1964 Chile's National Library commemorated his sixtieth birthday by organising a series of lectures on Neruda by eminent poets and writers. In 1969 he was designated the candidate for the presidency of Chile by the Communist Party. But later he resigned to permit Salvador Allende to be the party's sole candidate. In 1970 when Salvador Allende became president of Chile, Neruda was appointed ambassador to France.

Many prestigious awards were conferred upon Neruda such as the International Peace Prize in 1950, the Lenin Peace Prize and Stalin Peace Prize in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.

Neruda was named along with Chaplin, Gandhi

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and Kennedy as one of the most outstanding characters of the 20th century. His political life was as absorbing as his creative life. Neruda's biographer and nephew Bernardo Reyes remembers him as an incredible man "who had many toys". As Neruda writes in his *Memoirs*, his house was a collection of toys: "I have also built my house like a toy house and I play in it from morning till night".

Neruda had great love and respect for the Cuban Revolution. He says: "I became the first poet to devote an entire book to praising the Cuban revolution". Neruda confesses his uncompromising stand and pride in being a "fighting revolutionary" as he calls himself. He hated the ravages of war and the hate it engendered, but he strongly believed in the power of love; "I am convinced that there will be mutual understanding among human beings achieved in spite of all the suffering, the blood, the broken glass". Some of the lines from Neruda have become immortal:

"You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming"

"I want to do with you what spring does to the cherry trees"

When the President banned Communism in Chile in 1948 a warrant was issued to arrest Neruda. He had to go into exile for many years. After the death of Che Guevara in Bolivia, in 1967, Neruda wrote several articles lamenting the loss of "a great hero". Neruda condemned the United States for its involvement in the Vietnam War. The Colombian novelist Gabriel García Marquez called him "the greatest poet of 20th century in any language". Neruda was intimately

related to T. S. Eliot. He felt that no one understood him better than Eliot who was an ardent admirer of his poetry. But when Eliot started writing poems, Neruda said "I locked myself in the bathroom", because he didn't want to lose a passionate reader. A lot of controversy lingered around the death of Neruda when he passed away on September 23, 1973. Although officially it was reported that Neruda died due to cancer, it was interpreted by many as murder by poisoning.

"Memoirs" is Neruda's life story as well as a fine narration of Latin American history, it is a self exploration of an enigmatic personality who shares his passion for poetry and politics and reveals his intimate association with Lorca, Vallejo, Picasso, Gandhi, Mao, Castro, Allende and many others. "Perhaps I didn't live just in myself, perhaps I lived the lives of others", says Neruda in the preface to *Memoirs*. His self materializes as a poet, when it encompasses and assimilates the many lives he met during the course of his life.

The section entitled 'The Word' is a great paean to poetry. Neruda relishes words, savours them and fondles them in an attempt at harnessing their poetic potentials and emotions in diverse permutations, eliciting rapture. One sees a man drunk with poetry revelling in its intoxication. The whole passage is rendered in italics and stands out like a poem. There are three other passages rendered in the same manner: the 'reclining Gods', 'The Mask and the War,' and 'Poetry'. This passage is replete with images and surrealistic expressions. It is highly suggestive and picturesque.

Text:**The Word**

*... You can say anything you want, yessir, but it's
the words
that sing, they soar and descend ... I bow to them .
... I love
them, I cling to them, I run them down, I bite into
them, I melt
them down ... I love words so much ... The
unexpected
ones ... The ones I wait for greedily or stalk until,
suddenly,
they drop ... Vowels I love ... They glitter like colored
stones, they leap like silver fish, they are foam,
thread, metal,
dew ... I run after certain words ... They are so
beautiful
that I want to fit them all into my poem ... I catch
them in midflight,
as they buzz past, I trap them, clean them, peel them,
I set
myself in front of the dish, they have a crystalline
texture to me,
vibrant, ivory, vegetable, oily, like fruit, like algae,
like agates,*

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like olives . . . And then I stir them, I shake them, I drink them,
I gulp them down, I mash them, I garnish them, I let them go
... / leave them in my poem like stalactites, like slivers of polished wood, like coals, pickings from a shipwreck, gifts from the waves . . . Everything exists in the word . . . An idea goes through a complete change because one word shifted its place, or because another settled down like a spoiled little thing inside a phrase that was not expecting her but obeys her . . . They have shadow, transparence, weighty feathers, hair, and everything they gathered from so much rolling down the river, from so much wandering from country to country, from being roots so long . . . They are very ancient and very new . . . They live in the bier, hidden away, and in the budding flower . . . What a great language I have, it's a fine language we inherited from the fierce conquistadors . . . They strode over the giant cordilleras over

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the rugged Americas; hunting for potatoes, sausages, beans, black tobacco, gold, corn, fried eggs, with a voracious appetite not found in the world since then . . . They swallowed up everything, religions, pyramids, tribes, idolatries just like the ones they brought along in their huge sacks . . . Wherever they went, they razed the land . . . But words fell like pebbles out of the boots of the barbarians, out of their beards, their helmets, their horseshoes, luminous words that were left glittering here . . . our language. We came up losers . . . We came up winners . . . They carried off the gold and left us the gold . . . They carried everything off and left us everything . . . They left us the words.

Glossary:

stalk: approach stealthily

algae : an aquatic plant

agates: a mineral of the quartz family, one of the oldest healing stones on earth, used as a protective stone

garnish: decorate food with other food items

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mash: reduce food to a pulpy mass

stalactites: a tapering structure hanging like an icicle from the roof of a cave

slivers: a small thin piece of something, for example a sliver of cheese

bier: marble frame on which a coffin or corpse is placed before being carried to the funeral

conquistadors: a conqueror, one of the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru

Cordilleras: a chain of mountains (used in Spanish)

rugged: rough, uneven rocky area

sausages: a food item in the form of a cylindrical length of minced pork or meat, sold raw to be grilled before eating

voracious: unquenchable, greedy

appetite: a natural desire to satisfy a bodily need for food

idolatries: the worship of idols

barbarians: uncivilized people

Exercises:

I. Answer the following questions in one word or a phrase:

1. What 'glitters like coloured stones'?
2. About what does Neruda say "I bow to them"?
3. A chain of mountains in Spanish is termed _____.
4. Neruda compares words to a healing Stone called _____.
5. In honour of which Czech poet did Neruda adopt his pseudonym?

II. Answer the following questions in one or two sentences:

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1. How does an idea undergo a complete change according to Neruda?

2. What are vowels compared to?

3. What was left behind by the conquistadors?

4. List a few similes used by Neruda to compare words.

5. "I leave them in poem like stalactites". Explain briefly

III. Answer the following questions in a paragraph:

1. Discuss the domestic images that surface in the passage.

2. Explain "they carried off the gold and left us the gold".

3. Analyse the poetic quality of the passage.

4. What are the surrealistic elements in the passage?

IV. Attempt an essay on the following questions:

1. 'The Word' is Neruda's tribute to his uncontrollable passion for poetry. Discuss.
2. Neruda's prose is densely poetic and replete with visual images. Substantiate.

Activity:

1. Read the passages on 'Poetry,' 'The reclining Gods', 'The mask and Wars' from *Memoirs*.
2. Write an appreciation of Neruda's love poems.

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the freedom of the streets as soon as I could say our telephone number". She used to read a wide variety of subjects such as geology, natural history, entomology, epidemiology, poetry and so on.

Dillard's books were translated into not less than 10 languages. Her major works are *Tickets for a Prayer Wheel* (1974), *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), *Holy the Firm* (1977), *Living by Fiction* (1982), *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1982), *An American Childhood* (1987), *The May Trees* (2007), *The Abundance* (2016). *An American Childhood* is Dillard's autobiography.

Dillard taught for 21 years in the English department of Wesleyan University in Connecticut. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction in 1975 for her work *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

The book has been described as a naturalist classic. Annie Dillard says that initially she had thought this book would be read only by a few monks. But after the book won the Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction it reached a much larger audience. Dillard has been described as a perfect antidote for an epoch defined by mass attention deficit disorder. Dillard says about the work: "it's all a matter of keeping my eyes open". She could wait patiently and passionately for hours for a glimpse of a muskrat.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is an exciting meditation on nature and its seasons. It is a personal narrative revealing the writer's exploration during a whole year on foot in her neighbourhood in Tinker Creek in Virginia. She examines, interrogates and experiments

PILGRIM AT TINKER CREEK

Annie Dillard

Introduction

Annie Dillard was born on April 30, 1945 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States. Her essays of contemplation on the world of nature made this American author extremely popular. Her curriculum vitae denotes she has no religion and she is a democrat. Regarding her writing process she makes a striking observation: "I do not so much write a book as sit up with it as a dying friend, I hold its hand and hope it will get better". Annie Dillard is simultaneously a poet, naturalist, novelist, essayist, critic, theologian, collagist and singer.

Her prose is richly poetic and densely philosophic. When she writes 'strange things become familiar and vice versa'. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Dillard looks at the marvels of nature and searches for God. As she rightly puts it, she is a theologian undertaking a pilgrimage into nature. She scrutinises nature with monastic patience and a microscopic eye.

Dillard was the eldest of three girls and, as she claims in her childhood memoir, had great affection for her parents having enjoyed a very joyous childhood. She recollects, "my mother had given me

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with clinical precision, providing microscopic details of the hitherto unheeded moments in the natural world. As the strange drama of life gets enacted before our eyes, we are directed to see afresh and muse about the creator's vision and purport. As she attempts to decode the enigma of the water bug sucking the life out of a frog, or from the praying mantis laying eggs after deforming the male, or from the monarch butterflies which hatch and carry the smell of the previous seasons with them before migrating to the south, the reader is filled with awe and reverence at this re-cognition of the natural world. Dillard was greatly inspired by Thoreau's *Walden*. But unlike Thoreau, in the *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* Dillard does not discuss her memories of the past, her motives or the house she lives in or people around her. There are no explicit opinions about society.

Text:

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

A couple of summers ago I was walking along the edge of the island to see what I could see in the water, and mainly to scare frogs. Frogs have an inelegant way of taking off from invisible positions on the bank just ahead of your feet, in dire panic, emitting a froggy "Yike!" and splashing into the water. Incredibly, this amused me, and, incredibly, it amuses me still. As I walked along the grassy edge of the island, I got better and better at seeing frogs both in and out of the water. I learned to recognize, slowing down, the difference in texture of the light reflected from mud bank, water, grass, or frog. Frogs were flying all around me. At the

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end of the island I noticed a small green frog. He was exactly half in and half out of the water, looking like a schematic diagram of an amphibian, and he didn't jump.

He didn't jump; I crept closer. At last I knelt on the island's winter killed grass, lost, dumbstruck, staring at the frog in the creek just four feet away. He was a very small frog with wide, dull eyes. And just as I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent. He was shrinking before my eyes like a deflating football. I watched the taut, glistening skin on his shoulders ruck, and rumple, and fall. Soon, part of his skin, formless as a pricked balloon, lay in floating folds like bright scum on top of the water: it was a monstrous and terrifying thing. I gaped bewildered, appalled. An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog; then the shadow glided away. The frog skin bag started to sink.

I had read about the giant water bug, but never seen one. "Giant water bug" is really the name of the creature, which is an enormous, heavy-bodied brown bug. It eats insects, tadpoles, fish, and frogs. Its grasping forelegs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes a victim with these legs, hugs it tight, and paralyzes it with enzymes injected during a vicious bite. That one bite is the only bite it ever takes. Through the puncture shoot the poisons that dissolve the victim's muscles and bones and organs—all but the skin—and through it the giant water bug sucks out the victim's body, reduced to a juice. This event is quite

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common in warm fresh water. The frog I saw was being sucked by a giant water bug. I had been kneeling on the island grass; when the unrecognizable flap of frog skin settled on the creek bottom, swaying, I stood up and brushed the knees of my pants. I couldn't catch my breath.

Of course, many carnivorous animals devour their prey alive. The usual method seems to be to subdue the victim by downing or grasping it so it can't flee, then eating it whole or in a series of bloody bites. Frogs eat everything whole, stuffing prey into their mouths with their thumbs. People have seen frogs with their wide jaws so full of live dragonflies they couldn't close them. Ants don't even have to catch their prey: in the spring they swarm over newly hatched, featherless birds in the nest and eat them tiny bite by bite.

That it's rough out there and chancy is no surprise. Every live thing is a survivor on a kind of extended emergency bivouac. But at the same time we are also created. In the Koran, Allah asks, "The heaven and the earth and all in between, thinkest thou I made them in jest?" It's a good question. What do we think of the created universe, spanning an unthinkable void with an unthinkable profusion of forms? Or what do we think of nothingness, those sickening reaches of time in either direction? If the giant water bug was not made in jest, was it then made in earnest? Pascal uses a nice term to describe the notion of the creator's, once having called forth the universe, turning his back to it: Deus Absconditus. Is this what we think happened? Was the sense of it there, and God absconded with it, ate it, like a wolf who disappears round the edge of the

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house with the Thanksgiving turkey? "God is subtle," Einstein said, "but not malicious." Again, Einstein said that "nature conceals her mystery by means of her essential grandeur, not by her cunning." It could be that God has not absconded but spread, as our vision and understanding of the universe have spread, to a fabric of spirit and sense so grand and subtle, so powerful in a new way, that we can only feel blindly of its hem. In making the thick darkness a swaddling band for the sea, God "set bars and doors" and said, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." But have we come even that far? Have we rowed out to the thick darkness, or are we all playing pinochle in the bottom of the boat?

Glossary:

dire: extremely serious, urgent

dumbstruck: so shocked or surprised that you cannot speak

snuff: put out, blow out, extinguish

sag: sink, subside

crumple: crush, squeeze

taut: stretched or pulled tight

glistening: shining

scum: a layer of dirt or froth on the surface of a liquid

gaped: stare open mouthed

appalled: shocked

bewildered: confused

vicious: brutal, violent

devour: eat hungrily, swallow

flee: run away from a place of danger

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bivouac: a temporary camp or shelter for sleeping outside

Pascal: Blaise Pascal one of the greatest Christian apologists of the 17th century who was also a French mathematician, physicist, writer and inventor who described his own experience with Deus Absconditus as a pitiable mystery."..... Seeing too much to deny and too little to be sure I am in a state to be pitied"

jest: joke

Deus Absconditus: a Latin phrase which means the hidden God. Isaiah 45:"truly thou art a God who hidest thyself"

Thanksgiving: a day of giving thanks (fourth Thursday of November in US) for the blessing of the harvest of the preceding year celebrated through prayers, feasts, parades etc.

malicious: evil, destructive

swaddling: wrap in garments or cloth like a baby

pinochle: a North American card game for two or more players using a 48 card pack

subtle: so delicate or precise as to be difficult to analyse or describe

"Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further": Who shut up the sea with doors when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, and break up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further and here

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shalt thou proud waves be stayed?" Job 38:8-11. The quotation is a statement that the Lord made concerning creation, when earth was being prepared as a habitation for man, when earth and seas were divided. No matter how huge or powerful or destructive the waves of the ocean may rise or threaten, they can go no further than God has ordered. This is the assurance that Lord gives drawing Job to his side.

"God is subtle but not malicious": During Einstein's first visit to Princeton University in April 1931. Einstein was told that a new experiment had upset his theory. But he was sure of his work." Subtle is the lord but malicious he is not," he told Ostwald Veblen. What Einstein meant was nature hides her secret because of her essential loftiness but not by means of ruse."(ruse means an action intended to deceive someone). For Einstein, God was a metaphor for nature and the natural order.

Exercises:

I. Answer the following questions in one word or a phrase:

1. What is described as a 'schematic diagram'?
2. What had attacked the frog?
3. What is the meaning of Deus Absconditus?
4. Who made the statement "god is subtle but not malicious"?
5. "Thinkest thou I made them in jest" is a line from _____.
6. _____ is a game of cards.

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7. Who used the phrase Deus Absconditus?
8. "_____ was shrinking before my eyes like a deflating football."
9. Pilgrim at Tinker Creek belongs to the category of literature nature classic
10. Annie Dillard won the Pulitzer Prize for literature for her work PTC - (1975)

II. Answer the following in one or two sentences:

1. What is the sight that continues to amuse Dillard?
2. How does the giant water bug attack the frog?
3. What is the usual method of devouring their prey by carnivorous animals?
4. What is the shrinking frog compared to?
5. What is Pascal's observation about God?
6. What is Einstein's concept of God and nature?
7. What question regarding the creator of the universe is appreciated by Dillard?

III Answer the following questions in a paragraph:

1. Describe the transformation that the frog underwent.
2. The attacking strategy of the giant water bug is sketched very vividly by Dillard. Examine
3. The role of the creator.
4. The marvels of nature explored by Dillard.

IV Attempt an essay on the following questions:

1. Analyse Pilgrim at Tinker Creek as a spiritual

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- excursion into the natural world.
2. Dillard makes the familiar world of nature appear strange and vice versa. Do you agree?

Activity:

1. Read Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and Dr. Salim Ali's *The Fall of a Sparrow*
2. Share your experiences about the thrilling and shocking moments in nature and discuss them.
3. Analyse the narrations on the National Geographic channel and Discovery channel.

I STAND WITH YOU AGAINST THE DISORDER

Jeanette Armstrong

Introduction

Jeanette Armstrong was born in 1948, on the Okanagan Reserve in British Columbia. She is a writer, an indigenous civil rights activist, a sculptor and an educationist. She is the first Native woman novelist from Canada. She is referred to as an educator and protector of the indigenous people. Her life has been an endless campaign wherein she strived to alter the deep-rooted prejudices and wrong notions associated with aboriginal people. Her main objective in writing was to educate young people about native culture and history. She received a traditional education from her Okanagan elders and thereby learnt the Okanagan Indian language and speaks it fluently. She is proud of her heritage. Writing, for her, is a healing process through which she constantly articulates that there is nothing disgraceful about her brown skin or native philosophy. She condemns the Western philosophers and their educational objectives which only serve to alienate the Indians from their indigenous selves, thereby accelerating the suicide rates among them.

Armstrong maintains an optimistic stance and

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communicates it to the people. She has a firm conviction that a connection can be established between the aborigines and the Europeans. "If we can connect at that honest level between people, between individuals, between sexes, races or classes, that's what's gonna make the difference and bring about the healing we human beings have, to bring us closer. It's not gonna be politics that will connect people. To touch and understand one another, is to bridge our differences". According to her, a democracy should respect and protect any individuals rights and if a single person is denied them, it jeopardizes the rights of others including that of women, minority or others.

She began her literary career by writing a poem on John F Kennedy. She has written two novels: *Slash* (1985) is her first and most famous novel. This is regarded as the first novel by a First Nation's woman. *Breath Tracks* is an anthology of poems published in 1991. Her second novel *Whispering Shadows* was written in 2000. *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction* is a collection of her short stories and two children's books.

According to Armstrong, individual creativity involves larger community obligations. She says "...however much the artist is elevated, the community alongside must be elevated as well and must benefit as well".

Jeanette Armstrong is a Professor of Indigenous Studies and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Philosophy. She derives great satisfaction in that, her research contributes directly to the empowerment of

the Okanagan community and other indigenous communities and provides them with a positive outlook. Even in her literary works, novels, poems etc, she tries to relate to the life of her student community and fellow beings. One of the objectives of her research and writing is to revitalize the indigenous methods of knowledge documentation and storytelling which is deliberately substituted by western conventions, causing a cultural blindness.

"I Stand With You Against Disorder" is an article in YES Magazine.org posted by Jeanette Armstrong on November 8, 2005. This article was adapted from *Paradigm Wars: Indigenous People's Resistance to Economic Globalization*, edited by Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz. In this article, Armstrong points out the destructive effects of global economy. She declares her unflinching loyalty to the Okanagan community and all other similar indigenous tribes who are compelled to become cheap labour force and face the threat of dispossession, becoming victims of privatization of land and thoughtless exploitation of resources. The westernization of 'undeveloped' cultures is only a cunning pretext to generate new markets. The Okanagans, according to Armstrong are people who promote bio-regionally self sufficient economies and the knowledge that the total community must be engaged in order to attain sustainability. The objective of the article is her declaration of solidarity against the violence of cultural imperialism. She aspires to alter the prevalent paradigms of development and progress by joining hands with the Okanagans.

Text: I Stand With You Against the Disorder

(I am from the Okanagan, a part of British Columbia that is very dry and hot. Around my birthplace are two rocky mountain ranges: the Cascades on one side and the Selkirks on the other. The main river that flows through our lands is the Columbia.

My mother is a river Indian. The Kettle River people are in charge of the fisheries in the northern parts of the Columbia River system in our territories.

My father's people are mountain people. They occupied the northern part of British Columbia, known as the Okanagan Valley. My father's people were hunters. My name is passed on from my father's side of the family and is my great-grandmother's name.

I am associated with my father's side, but I have a right and a responsibility to the river through my mother's birth and my family education.)

So that is who I am.

When I introduce myself to my own people in my own language, I describe these things because it tells them what my responsibilities are and what my goal is, what I need to carry with me, what I project, what I teach and what I think about, what I must do and what I can't do.

The way we talk about ourselves as Okanagan people is difficult to replicate in English. When we say the Okanagan word for ourselves, we are actually

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saying "the ones who are dream and land together." That is our original identity. Before anything else, we are the living, dreaming Earth pieces. Dream is the closest word that approximates the Okanagan. But our word doesn't precisely mean dream. It actually means "the unseen part of our existence as human beings." It may be the mind or the spirit or the intellect. We are mind as well as matter. We are dream, memory, and imagination.

Another part of the word means that if you take a number of strands of hair, or twine, place them together, and then rub your hands and bind them together, they become one strand. You use this thought symbolically when you make twine, thread, and coiled baskets. This part of the word refers to us being tied into and part of everything else. It refers to the dream parts of ourselves forming our community.

I explain this to try to bring our whole society closer to that kind of understanding, because without that deep connection to the environment, to the Earth, to what we actually are, to what humanity is, we lose our place, and confusion and chaos enter.

When we Okanagans speak of ourselves as individuals, we speak of four main capacities that operate together: the physical self, the emotional self, the thinking-intellectual self, and the spiritual self. The four selves join us to the rest of creation.

Okanagans teach that the body is Earth itself. Our flesh, blood, and bones are Earth-body; in all cycles in which Earth moves, so does our body. We are everything that surrounds us, including the vast forces

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we only glimpse. If we cannot continue as an individual life form, we dissipate back into the larger self.

As Okanagans we say the body is sacred. It is the core of our being, which permits the rest of the self to be. It is the great gift of our existence. Our word for body literally means "the land-dreaming capacity."

The emotional self is that which connects to other parts of our larger selves around us. We use a word that translates as heart. It is a capacity to form bonds with particular aspects of our surroundings. We say that we as people stay connected to each other, our land, and all things by our hearts.

The thinking-intellectual self has another name in Okanagan. Our word for thinking/logic and storage of information (memory) is difficult to translate into English. The words that come closest in my interpretation mean "the spark that ignites." We use the term that translates as "directed by the ignited spark" to refer to analytical thought. In the Okanagan language, this means the other capacities we engage in when we take action are directed by the spark of memory once it is ignited.

We know that in our traditional Okanagan methods of education, we must be disciplined to work in concert with the other selves to engage ourselves beyond our automatic-response capacity. We know too that unless we always join this thinking capacity to the heart-self, its power can be a destructive force both to ourselves and to the larger selves that surround us (A fire that is not controlled can destroy)

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The Okanagan teach that each person is born into a family and a community. No person is born isolated from those two things. As an Okanagan you are automatically a part of the community. You belong. All within family and community are affected by the actions of any one individual. The capacity to bond is critical to individual wellness. Without it the person is said to be "crippled/incapacitated" and "lifeless." Not to have community or family is to be scattered or falling apart.

The Okanagan refer to relationship to others by a word that means "our one skin." This means that we share more than a place; we share a physical tie that is uniquely human. It also means that the bond of community and family includes the history of the many who came before us and the many ahead of us who share our flesh. We are tied together by those who brought us here and gave us blood and gave us place. Our most serious teaching is that community comes first in our choices, then family, and then ourselves as individuals, because without community and family we are truly not human.

Glossary:

Okanagan: a region in the Canadian province of British Columbia

River Indian: Colorado River Indian Tribes, which consist of four distinct ethnic groups. The tribe has around 4277 enrolled members.

in concert with: acting jointly

crippled: disabled

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incapacitated: deprived of strength or power

Exercises

I. Answer the following questions in one word or a phrase:

1. Name the river that flows through Okanagan. (Colorado)
2. To which ethnic tribe group does Armstrong's mother belong? (River Indians)
3. What is the meaning of the Okanagan word that refers to relationships? (our one skin) (River Indians)
4. Which tribe is in charge of the fisheries? (River Indians)
5. Okanagans teach that the body is _____.

II. Answer the following in one or two sentences:

1. What are the four main capacities that operate together when the Okanagans speak of themselves as individuals? (Physical, emotional, spiritual, social)
2. What does the Okanagan word for "ourselves" mean? (we are all one and together) (spiritual)
3. How do the Okanagans treat the body? (with respect)
4. What word comes closest to the meaning of thinking -intellectual self? (spirit that ignites)
5. What are the two rocky mountain ranges around Armstrong's birthplace? (Cascades, Selkirks)

III. Answer the following questions in a paragraph:

1. What is unique about the Okanagan educational practices?
2. How is the word relationship understood by Okanagans?

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3. What is the Okanagan concept of the body?
4. Explain the word that approximates the Okanagan?

IV. Attempt an essay on the following questions:

1. Examine the Okanagan as a language of a community.
2. "I know that being Okanagan helps me have the capacity to bond with everything and every person I encounter". Discuss this statement by Armstrong in the light of the article.

Activity

1. Read the complete article "I Stand with you Against the Disorder." Read similar articles on other indigenous tribes and their attempts to reclaim their culture.
2. Read Jeanette Armstrong's poem "Indian Woman."

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP

Nellie Wong

Introduction

Nellie Wong was born on September 12, 1934 in Oakland, California. She is a renowned revolutionary feminist poet and activist who has strived to address socialist causes. Her parents were Chinese immigrants. At a very early age she started working in a restaurant begun by her parents. After having graduated from Oakland High School, she worked as a secretary for Bethlehem Steel Corporation for several years. Later she studied creative writing at San Francisco State University. During the Second World War when Japan bombed America's naval base Pearl Harbor, Nellie was a child. This had a fearful and painful impact on her life because people would classify her family as Japanese when they were actually Chinese American.

Wong's collections of poetry include *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park* (1977), *The Death of Long Steam Lady* (1986), *Stolen Moments* (1997) and *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner* (2012). Some of the recurring themes in her poetry are issues of feminism, immigration and identity. She was greatly obsessed with the roots of Asian American culture and wrote at length about the Asian immigration to America : "It is

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something every Asian family has experienced.” Her article titled “Asian American Women and Politics” was recently included in an Asian American anthology. A remarkable aspect of Wong’s poetic career is that she is one of the founding members of the writing collective Unbound Feet. This was a performance group of Chinese American women who read together and lectured at universities throughout California in the late 1970’s. Some of her poems like “Songs of Farewell” have been installed in public sites as plaques in San Francisco, a visible evidence of the impact of her poetry. Juan Felipe Herrera observes that Wong’s poetry “fuses a stark historical landscape with the deep passion for life that emerges from generations of cultural wisdom and generations of suffering.”

Quite proudly Wong has declared her feminist socialist perspective: “the more I see some people fighting back, the more I see everyone acquiring the strength to fight back”. She clarifies further “otherwise I’d just shut my door and say ‘goodbye world,’ but that’s not me.” She has delivered a series of very popular and powerful lectures titled “Women and Revolution Alive and Inseparable” at the Radical Women’s Conference. According to her, women should continue fighting for the liberation of women, since it is as necessary as breathing. She was very concerned about the plight of immigrant women. She believed that the personal is political and that women are not condemned to live as victims on planet earth. She was an advocate of revolutionary feminism. At the radical women’s 41st anniversary Nellie-Wong declared that women’s liberation is necessary because “when women

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rise, everyone will rise.” She regards women as the most oppressed in the world. Socialist feminism, she perceived, was the key to a better world.

Many of her poems emerged from her working life, she says: “a lot of my poems come from the workplace, that is where I have experienced a great deal of sexism and racism”.

Nellie’s poems like “Where is My Country” raise issues regarding her Chinese American identity: how strangers often mistake her for someone else. At her workplace they assume she is a Korean, a policeman speaks to her in Spanish when she is in Mexico, in a grocery shop a Chinese inquires if she is a Filipino. All these people are insensitive to her identity.

Nellie Wong’s poems have been published in England, Italy, France to name a few. She served as a delegate for the first US Women Writers Tour to China. She has also served as a visiting professor in Women’s Studies at the University of Minnesota. She has read her poetry in China, Cuba and the United States. She was the keynote speaker at various national and regional conferences such as Third World Women and Feminist Perspectives, Women Against Racism and the National Women’s Studies Association. In 1989 she received the Women of Words Award from the San Francisco Women’s Foundation.

“When I Was Growing Up” is a frequently anthologized poem in educational curricula. This autobiographical poem by Nellie Wong highlights the identity crisis experienced by the Asian Americans. The poem depicts the past of the poet, her early

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childhood and adolescence. The narrator who is an Asian-American, is forced to incorporate the dominant white culture and disown that of her own, owing to her fear of being discriminated. The white culture allures and ensnares her with all its privileges. The poem analyses the struggle of a young lady to fit into the cultural majority. She is full of self loathing towards her yellow skin and yearns for the white skin, and perceives herself dirty. Beauty is coded as white. Nellie comments about the poem "that as a child I used to desperately wish for paler skin, lighter hair and rounder eyes. I would have gladly undergone any kind of re-invention available to be able to pass for white and stop hearing the ethnic slurs on the playground". In the concluding stanza of the poem there is a transition and a self-realization effected, as she discovers her ethnic identity. She reconciles herself with her Chinese American identity, thereby dismantling the stereotypes of the western beauty cult.

The poem is written in the past tense. The notable aspects of the structure of the poem are the indented stanzas and very little usage of capitalisation. The other techniques employed in the poem are that of rhetorical questions, imagery and repetition.

Text:

When I Was Growing Up

I know now that once I longed to be white.
How? you ask.
Let me tell you the ways.

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when I was growing up, people told me
I was dark and I believed my own darkness
in the mirror, in my soul, my own narrow vision.

when I was growing up, my sisters
with fair skin got praised
for their beauty and I fell
further, crushed between high walls.

when I was growing up, I read magazines
and saw movies, blonde movie stars, white skin,
sensuous lips and to be elevated, to become
a woman, a desirable woman, I began to wear
imaginary pale skin.

when I was growing up, I was proud
of my English, my grammar, my spelling,
fitting into the group of smart children,
smart Chinese children, fitting in,
belonging, getting in line.

when I was growing up and went to high school,
I discovered the rich white girls, a few yellow
girls,
their imported cotton dresses, their cashmere
sweaters,
their curly hair and I thought that I too should
have what these lucky girls had.

when I was growing up, I hungered
for American food, American styles
coded: white and even to me, a child born of Chinese

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parents, being Chinese
was feeling foreign, was limiting,
was unAmerican.

when I was growing up and a white man wanted
to take me out, I thought I was special,
an exotic gardenia, anxious to fit
the stereotype of an oriental chick

when I was growing up, I felt ashamed
of some yellow men, their small bones,
their frail bodies, their spitting
on the streets, their coughing,
their lying in sunless rooms
shooting themselves in the arms.

when I was growing up, people would ask
If I were Filipino, Polynesian, Portuguese.
They named all colors except white, the shell
of my soul but not my rough dark skin.

when I was growing up, I felt
dirty. I thought that god
made white people clean
and no matter how much I bathed,
I could not change, I could not shed
my skin in the gray water.

when I was growing up, I swore
I would run away to purple mountains,
houses by the sea with nothing over

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my head, with space to breathe,
uncongested with yellow people in an area
called Chinatown, in an area I later
learned was a ghetto, one of many hearts
of Asian America.

I know now that once I longed to be white.
How many more ways? you ask.
Haven't I told you enough?

Glossary:

Oriental: Asian. The term is regarded as offensive by Asians
especially by Asian Americans

oriental chick: an Asian female, a girl with Asian proportions
of beauty

swore: to make a solemn declaration or affirmation by some
sacred being or object

China Town: an area of a city outside China where many
Chinese people live and there are lots of Chinese
restaurants and shops

stereotype: standard conventional image, cliché, typecast

Yellowman: people having a yellowish skin regarded as an
offensive term for Asians. Note that there is a
repetition of the yellow colour in the poem

ghetto: an area of a city ,especially a slum area where
people of a particular race or religion live closely
together and apart from other people

Filipino: a native or inhabitant of the Philipines

Polynesian: the indigenous people who inhabit the islands

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of Polynesia which spreads over a large portion of the mid and Southern Pacific Ocean

exotic: foreign ;unusual and exciting because of originating in a distant place especially a tropical country

gardenia : a shrub of warm climates with large fragrant white or yellow flowers often chosen for wedding bouquets since they are associated with purity and love

Exercises

I. Answer the following questions in one word or a phrase:

1. _____ is Nellie Wong's nationality
2. _____ is a writing collective of Chinese American women founded by Nellie Wong.
3. Name the poem written by Nellie Wong which is permanently installed in a public place in San Francisco.
4. Name the lecture series which made Wong popular.
5. Complete the statement by Wong "when women rise _____."

II. Answer the following questions in one or two sentences:

1. Which is the most frequently repeated line in the poem? How many times is it repeated?
2. What kind of a poem is "When I was Growing Up"?
3. What was the discrimination practiced among the

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siblings that made the poet feel 'crushed between high walls'?

4. What is the image of the desirable woman that is seen in the poem?
5. What according to the poet was the concept of beauty that emerged through her habit of reading?
6. What made the poet proud of herself and experience a sense of belonging?
7. Who were the "lucky girls"?
8. What was regarded as unAmerican?
9. What were the poet's food habits?
10. Why was the poet ashamed?
11. What was the notion of cleanliness that made the poet desperate?
12. Where did the girl wish to escape to in her childhood fantasies?
13. What is the transition suggested in the concluding lines of the poem?

III. Answer the following questions in a paragraph:

1. What are the techniques used by the poet to explore the growth of the girl?
2. Identify the images of self loathing in the poem.
3. Analyse the image of the desirable woman popularised by the dominant white culture.
4. What are the images of racial stereotyping in the poem?
5. Discuss the evolution of identity in the poem.

IV. Attempt an essay on the following questions:

1. How does Nellie Wong depict the dominant white culture and its encoded precepts of beauty as victimizing the women of other races?
2. Nellie Wong's "When I Was Growing Up" is a poem of resistance. Discuss.

Activity:

1. Read the following texts

"To Other Women Who Were Ugly Once" by Ines Hernandez Avila, *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf

Listen to Nellie Wong's lecture series on "Women and Revolution Alive and Inseparable" on YouTube.

2. Discuss the changing perspectives of Keralites regarding female identity, body and language.
3. Analyse the cultural transitions in the life of Keralites as depicted in the movies.

Module 2

Speeches and Testimonies