**Literature and Poetry across the Indian Ocean**

By Teddy Horowitz

Since the inception of writing thousands of years ago in the Fertile Crescent, the interactions among various peoples along the Indian Ocean have contributed to a wealth of written works that showcase expansive histories and rich cultures. This lesson goes over a variety of literary works and poems that serve as reflections of authors’ firsthand experiences living along the Indian Ocean and provide different cultural narratives. They furthermore demonstrate the role of intercultural exchange that occurred as a result of trade and concurrent interaction between various people groups. Included are excerpts from major literary works, short stories, essays, and poems from before the Common Era to the beginnings of globalization spanning roughly 2000 years of history. Through this lesson, students will have the opportunity to read and become acquainted with important literary works from numerous cultural perspectives that impacted communities along the Indian Ocean. This includes pieces from the Middle East, Europe, East Africa, and India, among others.

In Part I of this lesson, students will read passages from different eras (i.e., Classical and Medieval) and written from different cultural perspectives (i.e., Greek and Arab) to learn about the early history of trade and how history of Indian Ocean trade can be expressed from very different vantage points based on time and culture. From reading select excerpts of the classical Greek text *Histories* by Herodotus and the popular Arab story collection of *One Thousand and One Nights*, students are able to easily compare and contrast these important differences. In Part II, students will become acquainted with poetry of the Indian Ocean and learn about the cultural exchange that defined Indian Ocean Trade through reading a selection of poems from across the world that exemplify this cultural exchange. Students will learn more about this through reading older Persian poems and newer Swahili and Malay/Indonesian poems that demonstrate the cultural influences from Indian Ocean exchanges. In Part III, students will read select works from various literary figures of the 20th and 21st centuries whose experiences living in communities along the Indian Ocean have been strongly influenced by the long history of intercultural exchange including British colonial rule of India and modern globalization. Overall, students should come away from this lesson plan understanding how literature can be used as a contextual device to better understand the history of the Indian Ocean. Students will be able to do this through analyzing how cultural exchange has influenced various literary traditions and how written works based on experiences on the Indian Ocean have changed over time.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To learn about the history of Indian Ocean trade in the context of literature

2. To become acquainted with different literary traditions from around the region

3. To highlight the role of cultural exchange involved in Indian Ocean Trade

4. To understand multiple perspectives among the numerous actors of Indian Ocean trade

**Time:**

Three class periods of 50 minutes to implement each part of the lesson plan

**Materials:**

Note: “N” represents the number of students in the teacher’s class

* Personal laptops/computers for n number of students accessible to the Internet
* One computer for the teacher that is accessible to the Internet
* One projector

**Links:**

* Indian Ocean World History (IOWH) Website: <http://indianoceanhistory.org/Maps.aspx>
* Handouts Link: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1nqsB0iDV577T55DpJWsz_9NfWEls0GTL>
* Crash Course – Indian Ocean Trade: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6XtBLDmPA0&t=105s>)
* Ted-Ed – Herodotus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A542ixwyBhc>

**Part I – Beginnings of Trade: Written Works of the Classical and Medieval Eras**

In-Class Video:

* [Ted-Ed – Herodotus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A542ixwyBhc) (approx. 5 minutes)

Read Alone:

* IOWH: *Histories* by Herodotus (Classical Era), Sohar (Medieval Era)
* [Sindbad the Sailor Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Miuc5W_WH0v9Fktw5F1DEkFsHse2dTBt) (adapted from Encyclopedia Britannica)

Read Together:

* [Herodotus Excerpts Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1usGL2uGjaZjjec6TvXzOqkX-t8h0oQoI)
* [Sindbad Excerpt Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1PkeCaTeaoHz_CVN1yTtU2AnB9aH-9Ttz)
* [For Teacher]: [Class 1 Discussion Questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1dufuuTlIXpbler6NM0r9IsjZuWbxyrsu)

**Part II – Influences of Trade: Poetry as an Expression of History**

Note: Have students use [Class 2 Questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1moWqD-6_bQG2vWDdrtbBykXUR8qAHck6) to guide class discussions. The questions focus on the role of intercultural exchange and the contrast in cultural perspectives that serve as expressions of different experiences along the Indian Ocean.

Malay/Indonesian Group:

* IOWH: Malay Account of Portuguese in Malacca (First Global Era) and Aceh, Sumatra (Industrial and Imperial Era)
* [Malay/Indonesian Language and Literatures Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Oi0863TnIWUC5WQqwXLGB31YvXFIzmTg) (adapted from University of Hawaii at Manoa and Encyclopedia Britannica)
* [Indonesian-Malay Poetry Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xV9XCEwEO6mepE8qk5auH8a5-Y-PjPUv)

Persian Group:

* IOWH: The United Dutch East India Company (VOC) (First Global Era)
* [Persian Influence Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=10Schm6tjy3-cX8OEo8MOI9hyMa2m5r6h) (adapted from Encyclopedia Iranica)
* [Persian Poetry Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ndjquixjx4euBChmS4ZRY4mHDGmR3MGl)

Swahili Group:

* IOWH: Kilwa and The Island of Zanzibar (BOTH Medieval Era)
* [Swahili Language Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1LsKRXIFlRRZOs6KaQDl8yJXC1514TebJ) (adapted from <http://www.glcom.com/hassan/swahili_history.html>)
* [Swahili Poetry Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1BOCNlR3g7VN42DmCys0KAi5dNO4Fpacx) (adapted from PBS)

**Part III – Modern Reflections of Trade: Poetry and Literature from the 20th and 21st Centuries**

Read Alone: Early 20th Century

* IOWH: Rudyard Kipling (Industrial and Imperial Era) and Rabindranath Tagore (20th Century and Globalization)
* [Kipling Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=133qCBSEACLPASR_aeJlph9Kyr8ynhQeN)
* [Tagore Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=14M49AvIRHBB6dLPPrw4EcC0pn4YMoSNf)
* [For Teacher]: [Kipling vs. Tagore Questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fFiI5iUXMRlVSAe4wNrZ16nDM7fO_8yX)

Read At Home:

* [Ghosh Handout](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zBrFFPLnmyXIIAHwXcyRE-0FO0AtdCBd/view)
* [Alharthi Handout](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pwx6PDgrY3ps43Tf4Gfr3EiLA_-JEzy_/view)
* [For Teacher]: [Class 3 Summary Discussion Questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1D1E-1gjKOvFizP8gjb-bz9GPiu5GbK3V)

Post-Lesson Evaluation:

To evaluate students’ understanding of the lesson, ask students to write a short response paper addressing one particular author or poet. Within it, they should discuss (1) what insights into Indian Ocean history can be gathered from the author’s or poet’s work, (2) how their work has influenced or was influenced through shared history, and (3) how their particular cultural perspective shapes their work.

**Suggested Procedure:**

Class 1:

1. (5 Minutes) Show short Ted-Ed video on *Histories* by Herodotus (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A542ixwyBhc>).
2. (15 Minutes) Have students briefly read the[Sindbad the Sailor Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Miuc5W_WH0v9Fktw5F1DEkFsHse2dTBt) and the [IOWH passages](http://www.indianoceanhistory.org/LessonPlan/ClassicalEra.aspx) of “*Histories* by Herodotus” and “Sohar”. Handouts provide some more context about Herodotus and also the popular medieval story of *Sindbad the Sailor*.
3. (30 minutes) Have students open up the [Herodotus Excerpts Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1usGL2uGjaZjjec6TvXzOqkX-t8h0oQoI) and [the Sindbad the Sailor Excerpt Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1PkeCaTeaoHz_CVN1yTtU2AnB9aH-9Ttz), and read together in class. After reading, ask students questions about their thoughts on some of the contrasting views on trade using the [Class 1 Discussion Questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1dufuuTlIXpbler6NM0r9IsjZuWbxyrsu), if desired. This includes different cultural perspectives (i.e., Greek and Arab) and perspectives based on the period (i.e., Classical and Medieval).
4. Homework: Separate students into three groups (i.e., Malay/Indonesian, Persian, and Swahili). Students should read their respective passages on the [Indian Ocean World History Website](http://www.indianoceanhistory.org/LessonPlan/MedievalEra.aspx) and answer [short questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1moWqD-6_bQG2vWDdrtbBykXUR8qAHck6) relating to them. Poetry handouts will feature questions regarding elements of history/culture found in the poems, the differing cultural narratives presented in each poetic tradition, the role of Indian Ocean trade in influencing or being influenced by the poetic traditions.
	1. Malay/Indonesian
		1. [IOWH](http://www.indianoceanhistory.org/LessonPlan/MedievalEra.aspx): “Malay Account of Portuguese in Sumatra” and “Aceh, Sumatra”
		2. [Indonesian Language and Literature](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Oi0863TnIWUC5WQqwXLGB31YvXFIzmTg)
		3. [Malay/Indonesian Poetry Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xV9XCEwEO6mepE8qk5auH8a5-Y-PjPUv)
	2. Persian
		1. [IOWH](http://www.indianoceanhistory.org/LessonPlan/MedievalEra.aspx): “The United Dutch East India Company (VOC)”
		2. [Persian Poetry Influence Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=10Schm6tjy3-cX8OEo8MOI9hyMa2m5r6h)
		3. [Persian Poetry Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ndjquixjx4euBChmS4ZRY4mHDGmR3MGl)
	3. Swahili
		1. [IOWH](http://www.indianoceanhistory.org/LessonPlan/MedievalEra.aspx): “Kilwa” and “The Island of Zanzibar”
		2. [Swahili Language Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1LsKRXIFlRRZOs6KaQDl8yJXC1514TebJ)
		3. [Swahili Poetry Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1BOCNlR3g7VN42DmCys0KAi5dNO4Fpacx)

Class 2:

1. (25 Minutes) Place students into groups of three (one student from each poetic tradition) to discuss the tradition they learned about. Students will compare/contrast the differences in style and potential influences upon one another. Students should use the [Class 2 Questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1moWqD-6_bQG2vWDdrtbBykXUR8qAHck6) to help guide their discussion.
2. (25 Minutes) Come back together and have students read the [IOWH passages](http://www.indianoceanhistory.org/LessonPlan/IndustrialandImperialEra.aspx) on Kipling and Tagore, the [Kipling Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=133qCBSEACLPASR_aeJlph9Kyr8ynhQeN), and the [Tagore Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=14M49AvIRHBB6dLPPrw4EcC0pn4YMoSNf) together in class. After reading, ask students questions (using the [Kipling vs. Tagore Discussion Questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fFiI5iUXMRlVSAe4wNrZ16nDM7fO_8yX), if desired) about contrasting views between Kipling and Tagore. This includes differences in cultural outlooks, perceptions of life in India, and how they choose to frame their poetry on the subject.
3. Homework: Have students read the [Alharthi Handout](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1pwx6PDgrY3ps43Tf4Gfr3EiLA_-JEzy_) and the [Ghosh Excerpt](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1zBrFFPLnmyXIIAHwXcyRE-0FO0AtdCBd). Readings will allow students to read works from the last ten years written by prominent writers of the region.

Class 3:

1. (20 Minutes) Have a closing discussion featuring some of the sample discussion questions provided in the [Class 3 Discussion Questions](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1D1E-1gjKOvFizP8gjb-bz9GPiu5GbK3V). These questions focus on overarching themes of intercultural exchange and the varying perspectives on Indian Ocean trade.
2. (30 Minutes) Let students complete the response paper outlined in the post-lesson evaluation on Page 3. Response paper should allow students to show what they have learned as illustrated by these learning objectives of this lesson.

Herodotus Excerpts

**Excerpt #1: On Gold-Digging Ants**

[[3.102](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Herodotus/3E%2A.html#102)] Besides these, there are Indians of another tribe, who border on the city of Caspatyrus, and the country of Pactyica; these people dwell northward of all the rest of the Indians, and follow nearly the same mode of life as the [Bactrians](https://www.livius.org/articles/place/bactria/). They are more warlike than any of the other tribes, and from them the men are sent forth who go to procure the gold. For it is in this part of India that the sandy desert lies. Here, in this desert, there live amid the sand great ants, in size somewhat less than dogs, but bigger than foxes. The Persian king has a number of them, which have been caught by the hunters in the land whereof we are speaking. Those ants make their dwellings under ground, and like the Greek ants, which they very much resemble in shape, throw up sand heaps as they burrow. Now the sand which they throw up is full of gold. The Indians, when they go into the desert to collect this sand, take three [camels](https://www.livius.org/articles/misc/dromedaries-and-camels/) and harness them together, a female in the middle and a male on either side, in a leading rein. The rider sits on the female, and they are particular to choose for the purpose one that has but just dropped her young; for their female camels can run as fast as horses, while they bear burthens very much better.

[3.104] When the Indians therefore have thus equipped themselves they set off in quest of the gold, calculating the time so that they may be engaged in seizing it during the most sultry part of the day, when the ants hide themselves to escape the heat. The sun in those parts shines fiercest in the morning, not, as elsewhere, at noonday; the greatest heat is from the time when he has reached a certain height, until the hour at which the market closes. During this space he burns much more furiously than at midday in Greece, so that the men there are said at that time to drench themselves with water. At noon his heat is much the same in India as in other countries, after which, as the day declines, the warmth is only equal to that of the morning sun elsewhere. Towards evening the coolness increases, till about sunset it becomes very cold.

[3.105] When the Indians reach the place where the gold is, they fill their bags with the sand, and ride away at their best speed: the ants, however, scenting them, as the Persians say, rush forth in pursuit. Now these animals are, they declare, so swift, that there is nothing in the world like them: if it were not, therefore, that the Indians get a start while the ants are mustering, not a single gold-gatherer could escape. During the flight the male camels, which are not so fleet as the females, grow tired, and begin to drag, first one, and then the other; but the females recollect the young which they have left behind, and never give way or flag. Such, according to the Persians, is the manner in which the Indians get the greater part of their gold; some is dug out of the earth, but of this the supply is more scanty.

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**Excerpt #2: On The Nile**

Now the Nile, when it overflows, floods not only the Delta, but also the tracts of country on ‎both sides the stream which are thought to belong to Libya and Arabia, in some places ‎reaching to the extent of two days' journey from its banks, in some even exceeding that distance, ‎but in others falling short of it. ‎

Concerning the nature of the river, I was not able to gain any information either from the priests ‎or from others. I was particularly anxious to learn from them why the Nile, at the commencement ‎of the summer solstice, begins to rise, and continues to increase for a hundred days- and why, as ‎soon as that number is past, it forthwith retires and contracts its stream, continuing low during ‎the whole of the winter until the summer solstice comes round again. On none of these points ‎could I obtain any explanation from the inhabitants, though I made every inquiry, wishing to ‎know what was commonly reported- they could neither tell me what special virtue the Nile has ‎which makes it so opposite in its nature to all other streams, nor why, unlike every other river, it ‎gives forth no breezes from its surface. ‎

Some of the Greeks, however, wishing to get a reputation for cleverness, have offered ‎explanations of the phenomena of the river, for which they have accounted in three different ‎ways. Two of these I do not think it worth while to speak of, further than simply to mention ‎what they are. One pretends that the Etesian winds cause the rise of the river by preventing the ‎Nile-water from running off into the sea. But in the first place it has often happened, when the ‎Etesian winds did not blow, that the Nile has risen according to its usual wont; and further, if the ‎Etesian winds produced the effect, the other rivers which flow in a direction opposite to those ‎winds ought to present the same phenomena as the Nile, and the more so as they are all smaller ‎streams, and have a weaker current. But these rivers, of which there are many both in Syria and ‎Libya, are entirely unlike the Nile in this respect. ‎

The second opinion is even more unscientific than the one just mentioned, and also, if I may so ‎say, more marvellous. It is that the Nile acts so strangely, because it flows from the ocean, and ‎that the ocean flows all round the earth. ‎

The third explanation, which is very much more plausible than either of the others, is positively ‎the furthest from the truth; for there is really nothing in what it says, any more than in the other ‎theories. It is, that the inundation of the Nile is caused by the melting of snows. Now, as the Nile ‎flows out of Libya, through Ethiopia, into Egypt, how is it possible that it can be formed of ‎melted snow, running, as it does, from the hottest regions of the world into cooler countries? ‎Many are the proofs whereby any one capable of reasoning on the subject may be convinced that ‎it is most unlikely this should be the case. The first and strongest argument is furnished by the ‎winds, which always blow hot from these regions. The second is that rain and frost are unknown ‎there. Now whenever snow falls, it must of necessity rain within five days;.so that, if there ‎were snow, there must be rain also in those parts. Thirdly, it is certain that the natives of the ‎country are black with the heat, that the kites and the swallows remain there the whole year, and ‎that the cranes, when they fly from the rigours of a Scythian winter, flock thither to pass the ‎cold season. If then, in the country whence the Nile has its source, or in that through which it ‎flows, there fell ever so little snow, it is absolutely impossible that any of these circumstances ‎could take place.‎

Sindbad the Sailor Handout

(Source: Britannica)

**Sindbad the Sailor**, Sindbad also spelled **Sinbad**, hero of [*The Thousand and One Nights*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Thousand-and-One-Nights) who recounts his adventures on seven voyages. He is not to be confused with Sindbad the Wise, hero of the [frame story](https://www.britannica.com/art/frame-story) of the [Seven Wise Masters](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Seven-Wise-Masters).

The stories of Sindbad’s travails, which were a relatively late addition to *The Thousand and One Nights*, were based on the experiences of merchants from [Basra](https://www.britannica.com/place/Basra) (Iraq) trading under great risk with the [East Indies](https://www.britannica.com/place/East-Indies) and China, probably in the early ʿAbbāsid period (750–*c.* 850). A strong infusion of the miraculous in the stories has exaggerated the dangers encountered.

In the frame story Sindbad is marooned or shipwrecked after he sets sail from Basra with merchandise. He is able to survive the terrible dangers he encounters by a combination of resourcefulness and luck and returns home with a fortune. Sindbad’s movement from prosperity to loss, experienced during a voyage filled with adventure, and back to prosperity, achieved when he returns home, is repeated in the structure of each tale.

The details of the stories of the voyages shed considerable light on seafaring and trade in the East. For instance, though Sindbad does not specify the goods that he takes from Basra, it is stated that he obtains diamonds and other [precious](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/precious) stones, sandalwood, camphor, coconuts, cloves, cinnamon, pepper, aloes, [ambergris](https://www.britannica.com/science/ambergris), and ivory during his voyages. Possible references to pirates are hidden in the tales of shipwrecks, which in the third and fifth voyages are caused by the fabulous [roc](https://www.britannica.com/topic/roc-legendary-bird), a bird that drops huge stones on the ship, and by hairy apes that swarm over the ship and leave the crew on an island. The savages in canoes who torture Sindbad and his shipmates on the seventh voyage may have been from the [Andaman Islands](https://www.britannica.com/place/Andaman-Islands).

The miraculous experiences of Sindbad’s travels find parallels in the literatures of several nations. For example, the giant roc, whose egg resembles a huge white dome, also appears in [Marco Polo’s](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marco-Polo) descriptions of Madagascar and other islands off the eastern coast of Africa. The whale that is mistaken for an island on the first voyage has parallels with the great whales described by Pliny and Solinus. Al-Qazvīnī (13th-century Persian geographer), Marco Polo, and St. Epiphanius (bishop of Constantia [now Salamis, Cyprus]; d. 403) mention areas similar to the valley of diamonds discovered by Sindbad on his second voyage. One can further relate the cannibal giants of the third voyage to the Cyclops of the [*Odyssey*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Odyssey-epic-by-Homer)*,* and the incident of Sindbad’s companions being fattened by cannibals with food that causes them to lose their reason suggests the lotus eating of the *Odyssey*. A Scythian custom of burying alive with the dead those who have been dear to them, referred to by St. Jerome, parallels Sindbad’s burial in the cavern of the dead, and the “old man of the sea” who, on the fifth voyage, compels Sindbad to carry him has been identified with the orangutans of Borneo and Sumatra.

Some scholars suggest that the tales of Sindbad’s adventures in turn influenced [Daniel Defoe’s](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-Defoe) *Robinson Crusoe* and [Jonathan Swift’s](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jonathan-Swift) *Gulliver’s Travels.*

Sindbad the Sailor Excerpts

## **SINDBAD THE SAILOR**

In the time of Harun-er-Rashid there was, in Baghdad, a rich merchant named Sindbad the Sailor, the source of whose wealth was a mystery. It seemed to be inexhaustible. For long seasons he kept open house, and his entertainments were the most magnificent of all save only those of Er-Rashid himself. All that riches could buy seemed at his disposal, and he lavished the good things of this life upon his guests. Pages, slaves and attendants there were in great number; his garden was spacious and beautiful, and his house was filled with every costly luxury.

This Sindbad the Sailor has a story to tell—the story of his life—but he never told it to any until, one day, there came to him one Sindbad the Landsman, a man of poor and humble birth. This man pleased him greatly with an apt recitation dealing with the widely different lots dispensed by God to men, and, being pleased, he was struck with the happy conceit that, now Sindbad the Sailor was at last confronted with Sindbad the Landsman, it would be no bad thing were he to narrate the story of his life so that all might know his strange adventures and conjecture no longer as to the source of his fabulous wealth.

Accordingly Sindbad the Sailor held seven receptions on seven different days, and, although on each occasion a multitude of guests was assembled to listen, he failed not to address his words from first to last to his simple listener,[8] Sindbad the Landsman. Following is his narration of the strange and wonderful adventures he experienced in his seven voyages:—

### THE FIRST VOYAGE OF SINDBAD THE SAILOR

MY father was a merchant of high rank and rich possessions. He died when I was but a child, leaving me all his wealth. When I reached manhood’s estate I used my inheritance with no thought for the morrow, living in a sumptuous manner and consorting with the richest young men of Baghdad. I continued this life for many years until, at last, when reason prevailed with me to mend my plan, I found with dismay that I had sunk to poverty. And then it was that I arose and sold what goods remained to me for three thousand pieces of silver, and girded myself, resolving to travel to other lands and rebuild my fortune by the wit of my mind and the labour of my hands.

With a part of my hoard I bought merchandise for exchange in far lands, and also such things as I should require in my travels. Thus prepared I set sail with a company of merchants in a ship bound for the city of El-Basrah. For many days and nights we sailed upon the sea, visiting islands and passing thence to other islands; and everywhere we bartered, and bought and sold. At length we came to an island unlike the others. It seemed like a garden that had floated from off the sides of Paradise and established itself in the sea. And here our ship cast anchor and we landed. Then fires were lighted, and, while some cooked, others washed in the cool stream, and yet others amused themselves admiring the beauties of the place.

When all had eaten of the food prepared the shore became a gay scene of sport and play, in which I engaged to the full. But, suddenly, a cry from the master of the ship put an end to our gaiety. Standing at the side of the vessel he called loudly, “Hear me, and may God preserve you! Hasten back and leave everything; save yourselves from sudden death, for this that ye think is an island is not such. It is a mighty fish lying entranced in sleep on the surface of the sea since times of old, and trees have grown upon it; but your fires and your frolicking have awakened it, and lo! it moves; and, if it sink into the sea, ye will assuredly be drowned. Hasten then, and save yourselves!”

At this we all, with one accord, left everything and fled for the ship, hoping to escape with our lives. While we were making for safety the island moved with a great turmoil and sank behind us in the sea, and the waves leapt against each other above it. For a time I gave myself up as lost, for I was drawn down fathoms deep; but, by God’s grace, I rose again to the surface, and to my hand was one of the large wooden bowls which some of the passengers had taken on shore for the purpose of washing. This I seized, and established myself in it, and thus combated the leaping waves, steadying myself with my hands and feet. In vain I called on the master of the ship. He heard me not. He had spread his sails and pursued his way, thinking that none beside those who had been taken up were left alive.

Astride my wooden bowl I gazed longingly at the ship until it was out of sight. Then I prepared for death as the night was closing around me. Perchance I swooned, for I remembered naught else until I found myself stranded upon a mountainous island. There were trees overhanging, and I grasped a drooping bough and drew myself up from the fretting wave. My limbs were benumbed, and, on looking at my legs, I saw the marks made by the nibbling teeth of fish, and marvelled at my salvation from death.

Staggering forward, I flung myself high on the beach like one dead, and so I remained until the dawn of the next day, when the sun, rising upon me, woke me to a sense of such a condition as I had never known before. Long—long it was before I could rise to a sitting posture, and longer still before I could crawl on my hands and knees to a space of grass that was shielded from the sun. Thence, in time, I staggered till I came to a brook, of which I drank; and strength returned to me. I found luscious fruits and ate of them, and drank again of the clear waters of the brook. And so I continued many days roaming the island and wondering at its beauties until I was strong again as before.

And it chanced, as I took my way to and fro in the island, revelling in the sight of things that God had set there, that on a day when the sea was sounding loudly on the shore I beheld something in the distance which excited my curiosity. It seemed like a wild animal of gigantic size, and, as I approached, I feared it was some fabulous beast of the sea. But, as I drew still nearer, I was overcome with amazement to see a beautiful mare standing high, with mane and tail floating on the breeze. She was tethered to a stake on the shore, and, at sight of me, she screamed loudly and stamped her fore-feet on the sand; but, ere I turned to flee, I beheld a man come forth from a cave near by, and he ran after me, calling on me to give an account of myself and my presence in that place. Thereupon I laid my story before him, sparing no detail, even to the wooden bowl by means of which and the grace of God I had come thither.

Gladness seized him at my recital, and he took my hand. Saying, “Come with me!” he led me into his cave and set food before me. I ate until I was satisfied; and, being at my ease, I repeated my story more minutely, and he wondered thereat. Then I said, “Thou hast the truth of my adventures upon the sea; now I pray thee, O my master, tell me who *thou* art, that thou dwellest hidden in a cave while thy mare is tethered on the shore.” He was in no way displeased at my curiosity, but answered me in plain words. “I am one of the grooms of the King El-Mihraj,” he said, “and the others are scattered about the island. For, look you, friend, it is the time of the new moon, when the sea-horse cometh up out of the sea; and it is our plan to bring our best mares hither and tether them by the shore so that they may lure the sea-horses into our hands.”

While I was wondering at the manner of this cunning device a magnificent sea-horse rose from the waves, shaking the foam from its crest and neighing loudly. As it approached, my companion drew me into the cave and placed himself at the opening with a long coil of thick cord in his hand. Presently by means of this he leashed the sea-horse with great dexterity, and fettered him, and subdued him. Then, with the mare and the sea-horse, he led me to his companions, who, when they had heard my story, were all of one mind that I should accompany them to the city of the King. So they mounted me on one of the mares and I rode with them to the King’s palace.

As soon as we had arrived at the palace gates they went in to the King and informed him of my strange adventures; whereupon he sent for me, and they led me before him. He greeted me very courteously and bade me tell him my story, which, when he had heard it, filled him with amazement, so that he cried, “By Allah! my son, of a truth thou art favoured by fate; for how else could’st thou escape so great a peril? Praise God for thy deliverance!” And he made much of me and caused me to be treated with honour; and he appointed me master of the harbour and comptroller of the shipping.

My condition then was no longer that of a wayfarer. I rose day by day to a higher and a higher place in the King’s favour, and he took me into his council in all affairs of State. For a long time I served him well, and he ceased not to recompense me with a liberal hand. Yet my thoughts turned ever to Baghdad, the Abode of Peace; but, when I enquired of merchants and travellers and masters of ships, in which direction it lay, and how one might come at it, they one and all shook their heads at the name of a strange city of which they had never heard. At last, weary of the wonders of that island and the sea around it—wonders the which, if I had time to tell you, would cause you the greatest amazement,—wearied, too, with my arduous duties, but most of all with my prolonged absence from my own land, I stood one day on the sea shore when a great ship drew near and a number of merchants landed from it.

The sailors brought forth their merchandise, and, when I had made an account of it, I enquired of the master of the ship if that were the whole of his cargo. “All, O my master,” he replied; “all save some bales whose owner was drowned on our voyage hither; but even these, being in my charge, I desire to sell on behalf of his family in Baghdad.” “Sayest thou so?” I cried. “Tell me, I pray thee, the name of the owner of these goods.” And he replied, “His name was Sindbad the Sailor, and he was drowned on our way hither.”

When I heard this I regarded him more closely and recognised him. Then I cried out, “O my master, I am he; and they are my goods that are in thy hold.” But he neither recognised me nor believed my words; whereupon I narrated to him the history of my supposed death; but he shook his head and called upon Allah to witness that there was neither faith nor conscience in any. “Look you!” he said. “Thou heardst me say the owner was dead, and therefore thou desirest the goods for thyself free of price. I tell thee we saw him sink into the sea with many others.” “O my master,” I answered, “hear me and then judge of my veracity.” With this I narrated to him many trivial things which happened before we reached the great-fish island, and which could never be known to me had I not been on the ship. And then it was that he and many of the merchants regarded me with fixed looks and recognised me. “By Allah!” said they one and all, “we truly believed thee drowned, but here we find thee alive.” And they pressed upon me and congratulated me, and the master of the ship gave me my goods, at sight of which I was overjoyed; and they all rejoiced with me.

Mindful of the King I served, I at once opened my bales, and, selecting the most costly articles, went in to him and laid them at his feet, telling him how I had regained the goods of which they were a part. And the King wondered greatly at my good fortune and graciously accepted my gifts. He also showed me great favour and honour in that he bestowed upon me gifts in return for mine.

Then, having sold my remaining goods at a profit, I bought largely of the merchandise of the city, and, when the ship was about to sail, I approached the King and thanked him for his great kindness to me, and humbly begged his leave to depart to my own city and family. So he gave me his blessing and a great wealth of merchandise and rare commodities, and bade me farewell. And soon thereafter, having stowed all my goods in the hold of the ship, I set sail with the others for Baghdad.

Our voyage was fortunate, and, with the aid of favourable winds, we reached the city of El-Basrah in safety. Thence I repaired to Baghdad, and my family and my friends gave me a joyous welcome. And when I had sold my merchandise I set up a large establishment, sparing no cost. And I bought land and houses, and gathered round me wealthy companions, in whose society I soon forgot the dangers and terrors I had suffered in other lands. Such is the story of my first voyage; and, to-morrow, by God’s grace, I will narrate to you the strange adventures of my second voyage.

**Class 1 Discussion Questions**

**Primary Learning Objectives**

-Understanding how literature can be used to view history

-Learning about how writings on a similar topic (i.e., the history of Indian Ocean exchange) can be influenced by different perspectives based on culture or time of writing

1. What do *Histories* by Herodotus and *Sindbad the Sailor* teach us about the history of exchange across the Indian Ocean? If so, what can we learn from these texts?
2. *Histories* by Herodotus is generally regarded as a mostly factual historical account derived from Herodotus’ travels that incorporates fictional stories. Contrastingly, *Sindbad the Sailor* stories are fictional works that were inspired by the real experiences of early traders on the Indian Ocean. As such, do we learn history differently from these different kinds of accounts? If so, how?
3. Do different cultural perspectives impact authors’ writing styles? If so, what are these differences?
4. Would different cultural perspectives of similar events affect how they are recorded by writers? Why would this matter?
5. Are there differences in perspective based on the era in which they were written? If so, what are these differences? Why would this matter?
6. Does cultural exchange affect the authors’ perspectives? If so, how?

Indonesian Lang/Lit Handout

(Sources: University of Hawaii, Manoa and Britannica respectively)

**The History of Indonesian**

From earliest recorded times Malay was, and still is, the native tongue of the people who live on both sides of the Straits of Malacca that separate Sumatra from the Malay Peninsula. Because the Straits have always been a busy sea thoroughfare, countless travellers and traders came into contact with its language. Over the centuries they bore Malay throughout the islands of Indonesia and the language became a widely used lingua franca, especially in coastal areas. This is one of the main reasons why, in the 20th. century, Malay was chosen as the national language of the Indonesian republic and why it has played such an important role in forging Indonesia’s unity.

Malay has also functioned as a court language. It was evidently the language of the Sumatran empire of Sriwijaya (9th to 14th centuries). It was also the language of the greatest of all medieval Malay states, Malacca. When Malacca was subjugated by the Portuguese in 1511, its traditions were scattered far and wide and inspired the court culture of smaller successor states like Johor-Riau, Kelantan and Aceh. So modern Indonesian, too, basks in the glow of prestige which adheres to the language from centuries of use in indigenous administration and court arts.

Malay has always been a language of trade and business. The medieval city-state of Malacca, like the renaissance European city-states of Genoa and Venice, and the modern city-states of Hong Kong and Singapore, thrived on trade. The Malay language came to be used for commerce throughout the Indonesian archipelago, so much so that a special, “boiled-down” variant of the language developed which became known as market Malay or bazaar Malay (*BahasaMelayu Pasar*). Thanks to this tradition, Malay seems to have adapted vigorously to the challenges of modern commerce. In modern Indonesia, the Indonesian language is easily the dominant language of business, especially at the middle and upper levels (local languages dominate in the rural market economy).

When Islam came to the Indonesian region it spread along trade routes and through coastal trading cities where Malay was used. Malay became linked with Islam and played a crucial role in the rise of Islam as the majority faith in the archipelago. Malay was also the language most widely used in the propagation of Christianity, especially in the now largely Christianised areas of East Indonesia. In other words, Islam and Christianity helped spread Malay, and Malay helped spread Islam and Christianity. Established religion has an important place in the Republic of Indonesia – there is even a powerful Department of Religion in the central government. Today the Indonesian language is associated with the “modern” religions of Islam and Christianity, and participates in their social prestige and spiritual power.

From the 17th century on, as the islands of Indonesia fell little by little under the control of the Netherlands, Malay came to be used by the European rulers as the most important medium of communication between government and people. Unlike in many other colonies, in Indonesia the language of the European rulers was not forced upon the local populace. Only a small elite of indigenous Indonesians ever learned the Dutch language, and consequently Malay, although still very much a minority language in the Indies, was crucial to the smooth administration of the colony. When the Japanese invaded the Netherlands East Indies in 1942 one of their first measures was to prohibit use of the Dutch language. Since very few Indonesians knew Japanese, Malay (now called Indonesian) had to be used in administration even more widely and intensively than it had been under the Dutch. With this track record of use in modern administration Indonesian easily and naturally assumed the mantle of official language and language of government under the Republic. Today all government business: legislation, administration, justice, defense, education, national development and so on is conducted wholly in Indonesian.

**Indonesian Literatures**

**Indonesian literatures**, the [poetry](https://www.britannica.com/art/poetry) and prose writings in Javanese, Malay, [Sundanese](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sundanese), and other languages of the peoples of [Indonesia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Indonesia). They include works orally transmitted and then preserved in written form by the Indonesian peoples, [oral literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/oral-literature), and the modern literatures that began to emerge in the early 20th century as a result of Western influence.

Many of the Indonesian songs, or poems, that were orally transmitted by professional priest-singers embody traditions that have a religious function. Improvisation played a great part in this kind of poetry, and there is reason to believe that in its present form much of it is of no great age. Indonesian orally transmitted prose forms are highly varied and include [myths](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myths), animal stories and “[beast fables](https://www.britannica.com/art/beast-fable),” [fairy tales](https://www.britannica.com/art/fairy-tale), [legends](https://www.britannica.com/art/legend-literature), puzzles and riddles, and [anecdotes](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anecdotes) and adventure stories. The divine heroes and [epic](https://www.britannica.com/art/epic) animals of these tales show the influence of [Indian literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/Indian-literature) and the written literatures of other neighbouring [cultures](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cultures).

Written literature in Indonesia has been preserved in the various languages of [Sumatra](https://www.britannica.com/place/Sumatra) (Acehnese, [Batak](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Batak), Rejang, Lampong, and [Malay](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Malay-language)), in the languages of Java (Sundanese and [Madurese](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Madurese-language) as well as [Javanese](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Javanese-language)), in Bali and Lombok, and in the more important languages of South Celebes (Makassarese and Buginese). By far the most important in both quantity and quality are the literatures in [Javanese](https://www.britannica.com/art/Javanese-literature) and [Malay](https://www.britannica.com/art/Malay-literature).

The earliest [extant](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extant) examples of Javanese literature date from the 9th or 10th century CE. An important position in this early literature is occupied by Javanese prose and poetic versions of the two great Hindu epics, the [*Mahabharata*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mahabharata) and the [*Ramayana*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ramayana-Indian-epic)*.* The Javanese also borrowed from [India’s](https://www.britannica.com/place/India) sophisticated court poetry in [Sanskrit](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sanskrit-language), in the process making it Javanese in expression, form, and feeling.

When [Islam](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam) reached Java in the 15th century, the mystical tendencies in it were incorporated by the Javanese into their own markedly mystical religious literature. Muslim influence was especially fertile during the early 17th century in Aceh, where Malay for the first time became an important written literary language. In Java, Muslim [legends](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legends) of saints were combined with [Hindu](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hinduism)-derived mythologies and cosmologies to produce imaginative works of historical narrative in which magico-mystical elements [play](https://www.britannica.com/art/dramatic-literature) a prominent role.

The Javanese and Malay literatures declined under the impact of Dutch colonial domination in the 18th and 19th centuries. Only in the 20th century did a modern Indonesian literature arise, closely linked as it was to the nationalist movement and to the new ideal of a national language, Bahasa Indonesia. After 1920 a modern Indonesian literature rapidly came into existence. Muhammad Yamin and other prominent poets at this time were influenced by the forms and expressive modes of [Romantic](https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism), [Parnassian](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Parnassian), and [Symbolist](https://www.britannica.com/art/Symbolism-literary-and-artistic-movement) verse from [Europe](https://www.britannica.com/place/Europe). The first Indonesian novels also appeared in the 1920s and ’30s; these were typical regional works by Abdul Muis and others in which the central theme is the struggle between the generations, between the stifling burden of traditionalism and the impulse for modern progress.

In 1933, with the appearance of the review *Pudjangga Baru* (“The New Writer”), a new generation of [intellectuals](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectuals) began to assess whether to maintain traditional values or to consciously accept Western norms in the effort to establish a modern but genuinely Indonesian [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture). This discussion was interrupted by the Japanese occupation of Indonesia in 1942, which eventually broke up a generation that was still closely bound to Indonesia’s colonial situation. With the Indonesian nationalist revolution of 1945, a new generation of fervently nationalistic and idealistic young writers who professed a universal humanism came to the forefront. Their inspiration and leader was the great poet Chairil [Anwar](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anwar-Chairil), who died in 1949 at age 27. The most prominent writer to emerge at this time was [Pramoedya Ananta Toer](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pramoedya-Ananta-Toer), whose support for the revolution led to his arrest in 1947 by Dutch colonial authorities. He wrote his first published [novel](https://www.britannica.com/art/novel), *Perburuan* (1950; [*The Fugitive*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Fugitive-novel-by-Pramoedya)), while imprisoned.

The political climate changed radically after the violent events that surrounded [Suharto](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Suharto)’s assumption of power in 1965–66. Strict government [censorship](https://www.britannica.com/topic/censorship) was introduced, and many writers were either imprisoned or silenced. Continued restrictions on freedom of expression limited literary activity during the following decades, although these restrictions were eased somewhat after Suharto’s resignation from the presidency, in 1998.

Indonesian/Malay Poetry Handout

**Song of a Young Malayan**

Not say I don’t appreciate poetry;
But you speak of poetry which have no rhyme,
Not like the ones I sometime quote
“What is our life so full of care
We got no time to stand and stare?”
But still I must admit
I don’t like poetry
Very much. I like music.

Not jazz American stuff,
Classical music worse still too long and dull,
I like the music to be sentimental
Like at night while dim light in my room,
I turn on the radio.
O Ross Hamilton is my favourite
His words so full of meaning
“I'll go out in the night
Buy you a dream.”

But I never like painting. In school
I hated Art like anything.
And Modern Art
I cannot understand. Like Picasso—
Why he always show
A man with funny shape
Head and body all mixed up?
I think
It is all nonsensical.

*by* Ee Tiang Hong
*from* I of the Many Faces (1960)

**Pines Scatter in the Distance**

Pines scatter in the distance,
as day becomes night,
branches slap weakly at the window,
pushed by a sultry wind.

I'm now a person who can survive,
so long ago I left childhood behind,
though once there was something,
that now counts for nothing at all.

Life is but postponement of defeat,
a growing estrangement from youth's unfettered love
a knowing there's always something left unsaid,
before we finally acquiesce.

[Chairil Anwar](https://www.poemhunter.com/chairil-anwar/poems/)

**Father Utih**

**I**

He has one wife - whom he embraces until death
five children who want to eat everyday
an old hut where an inherited tale is hanging
a piece of barren land to cultivate.

The skin of his hands is taut and calloused
accustomed to any amount of sweat
O Father Utih, the worthy peasant.

But malaria comes hunting them
even though he offers a million prayers
and Mother Utih calls the village medicine man
for magic formulas, curses repeatedly chanted.

The medicine man with his reward goes home
with money and a pullet tied together.

**II**

In towns the leaders keep shouting
of elections and the people’s freedom
of thousand-fold prosperity in a sovereign state
a golden bridge of prosperity into the world hereafter.

When victory brightly shines
the leaders in cars move forward,
their chests thrust forward
O! the beloved subjects wave their hands.

Everywhere there are banquets and festivities
delicious roast chicken is served
chicken from the village promised prosperity.

Father Utih still waits in prayer
where are the leaders going in their limousines?

1954

Usman Awang

*(Translated by Adibah Amin)*

**Persian Influences in English and American Literature**

(Source: Encyclopædia Iranica)

ii. PERSIAN INFLUENCES IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

Although academic Persian studies may be said to have begun in England in the early 17th century with the establishment of chairs in Arabic at the two leading universities at Cambridge and Oxford, it was not until the late 18th century that the Persian poets began to be read in English translations. This was due to the linguistic and literary skills of Sir William Jones (q.v.) and to the fact that Persian was the official language at the Indian courts. Thus, when Pitt’s India Act of 1784 brought the East India Company (q.v.) under direct control of the British crown, a veritable crash program in Persian studies was launched both at home and in India that would soon make the names of the Persian poets almost as familiar to English readers as those of classical Greece and Rome. The importance of India to Persian studies is attested by the fact that Sir William Jones himself, when called to India to head the new judicial system, threatened, as he wrote to Edward Gibbon, to drown his Persian books deeper than plummet ever sounded, for lack of patronage, when he was called to India to head the new judicial system.

Jones’s Persian Grammar, his various graceful translations of Ḥāfeẓ and his fellows, his learned discourses on the poetry of Persia and India all served to bring about what he had dreamed of as a young orientalist: that the cultivation of this newly discovered literature would provide English poets with “a new set of images and similitudes and [that] a number of excellent compositions would be brought to light, which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate” (Jones, X, pp. 359-60). This was patently a program for the Romantic Age in English literature, even though Jones was a neo-classicist who chose to call Ferdowsī “the Persian Homer” and Ḥāfeẓ “the Persian Anacreon.” It was some time before readers saw the Persian poets in their own dress and English poets imitated them.

Most of the poets and poetasters of the Romantic era, as distinguished from Jones and his orientalist associates, had little if any competency in the Persian language, though the temptation was strong to enter the field. William Wordsworth’s clergyman uncle wished that the young poet would take up the study of oriental languages. Samuel Coleridge once hoped for a cadetship in the East India service. Percy Shelley, it seems, actually began the study of Arabic, though his little poem entitled “From the Arabic” is more like an imitation of Jones’s translations than an original:

My faint spirit was sitting in the light  /  Of thy looks, my love;

It panted for thee like the hind at noon / For the brooks, my love.

The internal rhyme followed by a refrain captures the music of the ḡazal. R. M. Hewitt points out another ḡazal device in a poem of Shelley’s that is not otherwise oriental:

Less oft is peace in Shelley’s mind / Then calm in waters seen.

Whether accidental or intentional, this verse has the poet’s taḵalloṣ (pen-name) woven into the last couplet of the ḡazal (Yohannan, 1977, p. 33, nn. 110-12).

Walter Savage Landor thought the oriental fad was a taste for the “high-seasoned garbage of barbarians,” but apparently he could not resist joining the party with his nine Poems from the Arabic and Persian. Robert Southey had an equally low opinion of the Arabic and Persian imitations and translations, but he based his Thalaba and The Curse of Kehama on fairly wide readings in orientalia. Although Lord Byron nastily called these works of Southey his “unsaleables,” the fact is that they caught popular fancy. One American reviewer asserted that Southey’s treatment of Persian mythology was superior to Ferdowsī’s (Yohannan, 1977, p. 34, nn. 115-119).

Byron and Thomas Moore were only slightly more authentic in their orientalizing. Byron ridiculed one Robert Stott for having the effrontery to use “Hafez” as a nom de plume, but his rebuke shows him as capable of giving offense as seeing it: “What would be the sentiments of the Persian Anacreon, Hafiz, could he rise from his splendid sepulchre at Sheeraz (where he reposes with Ferdousi and Sadi, the Oriental Homer and Catullus) and behold his name assumed by one Stott of Dromore, the most impudent and execrable of literary poachers for the Daily Prints?”

Comparing Saʿdī with Catullus and burying Ferdowsī next to Ḥāfeẓ and Saʿdī were Byron’s very own bloopers (Yohannan, 1977, p. 40, n. 134). Yet Byron appears to have fooled Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review into believing that “The Giaour,” one of his so-called Turkish tales, was a genuine translation since it contained words like “kiosk,” “muezzin,” “Palampore,” and “ataghan.” It is possible to judge how calculated all this Eastern coloration of Western Romantic literature was from Byron’s note to Thomas Moore explaining: “The little I have done in this way is merely a voice in the wilderness for you; and if it has had any success that also will prove that the public are orientalizing, and pave the path for you.” (Yohannan, 1977, p. 36, nn. 126-28).

Moore did, indeed, cash in, for he learned one day that his famed Bendemeer’s song from “Lallah Rookh” had been translated into Persian and was being sung in that language on the streets of Isfahan (Yohannan, 1977, p. 35, n. 122).

Yet when all was said and done, the Romantic poets provided a very superficial adaptation of the materials of Persian poetry. Victorian authors had the advantage of a more serious concern for the content of Persian poetry and, thanks to the German orientalists, a more accurate view of the forms in which that poetry was written. Goethe’s enthusiasm for the German translations of Persian poetry by Josef von Hammer inspired not only a major author such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (q.v.) in the United states, but also secondary authors in England such as Clarence Mangan, R. C. Trench, and Monckton Milnes, to produce imitations twice removed, as it were, from the Persian originals (Yohannan 1977, pp. 63-65). The Germans also took more seriously the Sufi mysticism pervading Persian poetry. Edward B. Cowell, the chief advocate of the poetry, would not go all the way with a Sufistic interpretation, but he saw something more in Ḥāfeẓ than a “Persian Anacreon.” Cowell played a major role in bringing a genuine Persian strain into the main stream of Victorian literature through his acquaintance with Edward FitzGerald and Alfred Tennyson.

First it is fitting to turn to the national poet of Persia, Ferdowsī, and to the special appeal that he held for another major Victorian figure, Matthew Arnold. Sir William Jones had once proposed that a proper Greek tragedy might be made of the best known episode from the Persian epic, the Šāh-nāma; namely, the story of the death of the youth Sohrāb at the hands of his warrior father Rostam. Arnold had no knowledge of the Persian original, but he had read a synopsis (not entirely accurate) of the episode in Sir John Malcolm’s History of Persia. Later Arnold came upon a detailed review by the critic St. Beuve of Jules Mohl’s ongoing French translation of the Persian epic. Arnold’s lengthy poem “Sohrab and Rustum,” composed in blank verse, had a Homeric tone that he thought would impart classical health and vigor to the dominantly querulous poetry of the age, including his own melancholic verses. As it turned out, Ferdowsī’s native fatalism was in perfect harmony with Arnold’s melancholy. (Analyses of Arnold’s treatment of his sources are provided by Javadi, 1971 and Jewett.)

Tennyson’s early poetry in Poems by Two Brothers showed him to be in what might be called the “Sir William Jones phase of orientalizing,” but Tennyson’s next volumes, according to his friends Hallam and Milnes who reviewed them, revealed a more serious interest in “yonder shining orient.” His response to Persian poetry, at any rate, led him to undertake the study of the language, perhaps as early as the late 1840s, certainly by the mid-fifties when, according to his son, Tennyson strained his eyes by peering too long at small Persian script. His mentors were, it would seem, Cowell and FitzGerald. There has been some argument about the extent of Tennyson’s involvement in Persian poetry (see Yohannan, 1977, chap. 9, esp. nn. 247 and 255-260).

Unquestionably, the most far-reaching influence from Persian poetry upon the life and literature of England and America came from Edward FitzGerald’s Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. It not only replaced Thomas Gray’s "Elegy” as the most popular poem in the English language, but also laid the basis for a philosophical and sociological cult that was determined to liberate the bourgeois European mind from its neo-classical or Calvinist or Victorian restraints. This, in turn, produced an anti-cult that at its most extreme regarded the Rubáiyát as a sort of ethical plague that threatened the destruction of all moral values. The story of the Rubáiyát is a history unto itself, that can only be touched upon here. A particularly interesting study is D’Ambrosio’s account of T. S. Eliot’s youthful “possession” by FitzGerald’s translation when he came upon it at age fourteen and his equally strong rejection of it in his maturity (D’Ambrosio; some sense of the dimensions of the cult and anti-cult may be derived from Potter, Bibliography and Yohannan, 1971).

The popularity of this translation was so tyrannous among both general readers and serious critics that it affected the reputations of all other Persian poets in Europe, with the possible exception of Ferdowsī. Ḥāfeẓ, the favorite of the Romantics, came to be regarded as a latter-day Khayyam. Some of his ḡazals were translated into quatrains, as were also some of the didactic verses of Saʿdī. Academic scholars sought to maintain some semblance of balance by stressing the importance of the mystical poets Farīd-al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, Jalāl-al-Dīn Rūmī, and ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī. Reynold A. Nicholson asked: “What should they know of Persia who only Omar know?” He and his successor at Cambridge, Arthur J. Arberry, devoted a good portion of their scholarship to editing and translating the works of Rūmī. Yet it cannot be said that any of the Persian mystics found a FitzGerald who could give the Persian poet the literary standing he deserved, although Dick Davis’ Conference of the Birds translated with Afkham Darbandi (Penguin Classics, 1984) is a very successful rendering of ʿAṭṭār’s Manṭeq al-ṭayr.

A Scottish clergyman and Hegelian philosopher did, indeed, hope that his adaptations of some of Rūmī’s ḡazals from Rueckert’s German versions would demonstrate the moral superiority of Rūmī over Khayyam. But the subtitle of William Hastie’s little book of poems reveals that the villain in the piece played a larger role than the hero (Festival of Springfrom the Divan of Jelaleddin. . . with an Introduction and a Criticism of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Glasgow, 1903.)

It is perhaps fitting that this survey should end with a familiar complaint about what English taste has done to Persian poets in their English language dress: “It is characteristic that Omar Khayyam, rather than Firdausi, or Rumi or Hafiz, should be the best known Persian poet in the West; it is characteristic that Khayyam’s own reputation should be based on a translation which is Victorian and in fact very much an English poem of the Victorian temper; and finally, it is characteristic that Robert Graves, the only major English poet who has so far addressed himself to Persian poetry, should return to the well known Rubaiyat and not to much greater Persian poets, like Hafiz and Rumi, whose work lies buried under uninspired and unreadable translations” (Yohannan, 1977, n. 643, 704). Not entirely true; not entirely wrong!

**Persian Poetry Handout**

Rumi Short Poems:

Oh, if a tree could wander
     and move with foot and wings!
It would not suffer the axe blows
     and not the pain of saws!
For would the sun not wander
     away in every night ?
How could at ev?ry morning
     the world be lighted up?
And if the ocean?s water
     would not rise to the sky,
How would the plants be quickened
     by streams and gentle rain?
The drop that left its homeland,
     the sea, and then returned ?
It found an oyster waiting
     and grew into a pearl.
Did Yusaf not leave his father,
     in grief and tears and despair?
Did he not, by such a journey,
     gain kingdom and fortune wide?
Did not the Prophet travel
     to far Medina, friend?
And there he found a new kingdom
     and ruled a hundred lands.
You lack a foot to travel?
     Then journey into yourself!
And like a mine of rubies
     receive the sunbeams? print!
Out of yourself ? such a journey
     will lead you to your self,
It leads to transformation
     of dust into pure gold!

I've said before that every craftsman
searches for what's not there
to practice his craft.

A builder looks for the rotten hole
where the roof caved in. A water-carrier
picks the empty pot. A carpenter
stops at the house with no door.

Workers rush toward some hint
of emptiness, which they then
start to fill. Their hope, though,
is for emptiness, so don't think
you must avoid it. It contains
what you need!
Dear soul, if you were not friends
with the vast nothing inside,
why would you always be casting you net
into it, and waiting so patiently?

This invisible ocean has given you such abundance,
but still you call it "death",
that which provides you sustenance and work.

God has allowed some magical reversal to occur,
so that you see the scorpion pit
as an object of desire,
and all the beautiful expanse around it,
as dangerous and swarming with snakes.

This is how strange your fear of death
and emptiness is, and how perverse
the attachment to what you want.

Now that you've heard me
on your misapprehensions, dear friend,
listen to Attar's story on the same subject.

He strung the pearls of this
about King Mahmud, how among the spoils
of his Indian campaign there was a Hindu boy,
whom he adopted as a son. He educated
and provided royally for the boy
and later made him vice-regent, seated
on a gold throne beside himself.

One day he found the young man weeping..
"Why are you crying? You're the companion
of an emperor! The entire nation is ranged out
before you like stars that you can command!"

The young man replied, "I am remembering
my mother and father, and how they
scared me as a child with threats of you!
'Uh-oh, he's headed for King Mahmud's court!
Nothing could be more hellish!' Where are they now
when they should see me sitting here?"

This incident is about your fear of changing.
You are the Hindu boy. Mahmud, which means
Praise to the End, is the spirit's
poverty or emptiness.

The mother and father are your attachment
to beliefs and blood ties
and desires and comforting habits.
Don't listen to them!
They seem to protect
but they imprison.

They are your worst enemies.
They make you afraid
of living in emptiness.

Some day you'll weep tears of delight in that court,
remembering your mistaken parents!

Know that your body nurtures the spirit,
helps it grow, and gives it wrong advise.

The body becomes, eventually, like a vest
of chain mail in peaceful years,
too hot in summer and too cold in winter.

But the body's desires, in another way, are like
an unpredictable associate, whom you must be
patient with. And that companion is helpful,
because patience expands your capacity
to love and feel peace.
The patience of a rose close to a thorn
keeps it fragrant. It's patience that gives milk
to the male camel still nursing in its third year,
and patience is what the prophets show to us.

The beauty of careful sewing on a shirt
is the patience it contains.

Friendship and loyalty have patience
as the strength of their connection.

Feeling lonely and ignoble indicates
that you haven't been patient.

Be with those who mix with God
as honey blends with milk, and say,

"Anything that comes and goes,
rises and sets, is not
what I love." else you'll be like a caravan fire left
to flare itself out alone beside the road.

Hafiz Short Poems:

A rather serious – maybe too serious – universitystudent from another country came to Hafiz topersonally ask for his permission to translate someof Hafiz's poems into a little book.

And he said to Hafiz, "What is the essentialquality in your poems that I need to incorporate inmy translations to make them abiding and authentic?"

And Hafiz smiled, and placed his arms on the man'sshoulders, then said, "Do you really want to know?"

And the young man said, "Of course."

"Well, well then," Hafiz began and continued,

"My poems lift the corners of the mouth – the soul'smouth, the heart's mouth. And can effect any openingthat can make love."

For years my heart inquired of me

                   Where Jamshid's sacred cup might be,

And what was in its own possession

                   It asked from strangers, constantly;

Begging the pearl that's slipped its shell

                   From lost souls wandering by the sea.

Last night I took my troubles to

                   The Magian sage whose keen eyes see

A hundred answers in the wine

                   Whose cup he, laughing, showed to me.

I questioned him, "When was this cup

                   That shows the world's reality

Handed to you?" He said, "The day

                   Heaven's vault of lapis lazuli

Was raised, and marvelous things took place

                   By Intellect's divine decree,

And Moses' miracles were made

                   And Sameri's apostasy."

He added then, "That friend they hanged

                   High on the looming gallows tree—

His sin was that he spoke of things

                   Which should be pondered secretly,

The page of truth his heart enclosed

                   Was annotated publicly.

But if the Holy Ghost once more

                   Should lend his aid to us we'd see

Others perform what Jesus did—

                   Since in his heartsick anguish he

Was unaware that God was there

                   And called His name out ceaselessly."

I asked him next, "And beauties' curls

                   That tumble down so sinuously,

What is their meaning? Whence do they come?"

                   "Hafez," the sage replied to me,

"It's your distracted, lovelorn heart

                   That asks these questions constantly."

# **A Brief History of the Swahili Language**

#### Authors: Hassan O. Ali; revised by; Abdurahman Juma

(Source: glcom.com, author is the writer of Teach Yourself Swahili)

**Origin**

The Swahili language, is basically of Bantu (African) origin. It has borrowed words from other languages such as Arabic probably as a result of the Swahili people using the Quran written in Arabic for spiritual guidance as Muslims.

As regards the formation of the Swahili culture and language, some scholars attribute these phenomena to the intercourse of African and Asiatic people on the coast of East Africa. The word "Swahili" was used by early Arab visitors to the coast and it means "the coast". Ultimately it came to be applied to the people and the language.

Regarding the history of the Swahili language, the older view linked to the colonial time asserts that the Swahili language originates from Arabs and Persians who moved to the East African coast. Given the fact that only the vocabulary can be associated with these groups but the syntax or grammar of the language is Bantu, this argument has been almost forgotten. It is well known that any language that has to grow and expand its territories ought to absorb some vocabulary from other languages in its way.

A suggestion has been made that Swahili is an old language. The earliest known document recounting the past situation on the East African coast written in the 2nd century AD (in Greek language by anonymous author at Alexandria in Egypt and it is called the Periplus of Erythrean Sea) says that merchants visiting the East African coast at that time from Southern Arabia, used to speak with the natives in their local language and they intermarried with them. Those that suggest that Swahili is an old language point to this early source for the possible antiquity of the Swahili language.

**Words from Other Languages**

It is an undeniable truth that Arab and Persian cultures had the greatest influence on the Swahili culture and the Swahili language. To demonstrate the contribution of each culture into the Swahili language, take an example of the numbers as they are spoken in Swahili. "moja" = one, "mbili" = two, "tatu" = three, "nne" = four, "tano" = five, "nane" = eight, "kumi" = ten, are all of Bantu origin. On the other hand there is "sita" = six, "saba" = seven and "tisa" = nine, that are borrowed from Arabic. The Arabic word "tisa" actually replaced the Bantu word "kenda" for "nine". In some cases the word "kenda" is still used. The Swahili words, "chai" = tea, "achari" = pickle, "serikali" = government, "diwani" = councillor, "sheha" = village councillor, are some of the words borrowed from Persian bearing testimony to the older connections with Persian merchants.

The Swahili language also absorbed words from the Portuguese who controlled the Swahili coastal towns (c. 1500-1700AD). Some of the words that the Swahili language absorbed from the Portuguese include "leso" (handkerchief), "meza" (table), "gereza" (prison), "pesa" ('peso', money), etc. Swahili bull-fighting, still popular on the Pemba island, is also a Portuguese legacy from that period. The Swahili language also borrowed some words from languages of the later colonial powers on the East African coast - English (British) and German. Swahilized English words include "baiskeli" (bicycle), "basi" (bus), "penseli" (pencil), "mashine" (machine), "koti" (coat), etc. The Swahilized German words include "shule" for school and "hela" for a German coin.

**Spread into the Hinterland**

For centuries, Swahili remained as the language for the people of the East African coast. Long-time interactions with other people bordering the Indian Ocean spread the Swahili language to distant places such as on the islands of Comoro and Madagascar and even far beyond to South Africa, Oman and United Arab Emirates. Trade and migration from the Swahili coast during the nineteenth-century helped spread the language to the interior of particularly Tanzania. It also reached Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, Central African Rebublic, and Mozambique.

Christian missionaries learnt Swahili as the language of communication to spread the Gospel in Eastern Africa. So, the missionaries also helped to spread the language. As a matter of fact the first Swahili-English dictionary was prepared by a missionary. During the colonial time, Swahili was used for communication with the local inhabitants. Hence the colonial administrators pioneered the effort of standardizing the Swahili language. Zanzibar was the epicenter of culture and commerce, therefore colonial administrators selected the dialect of the Zanzibar (Unguja) town as the standard Swahili. The Unguja dialect (Kiunguja) was then used for all formal communication such as in schools, in mass media (newspapers and radio), in books and other publications.

Now Swahili is spoken in many countries of Eastern Africa. For Tanzania, deliberate efforts were made by the independent nation to promote the language (thanks to the efforts of the former head of state, Julius K. Nyerere). Tanzania's special relations with countries of southern Africa was the chief reason behind the spread of Swahili to Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, and other neighbouring countries to the south. Swahili is the national as well as the official language in Tanzania - almost all Tanzanians speak Swahili proficiently and are unified by it. In Kenya, it is the national language, but official correspondence is still conducted in English. In Uganda, the national language is English but Swahili enjoys a large number of speakers.

Swahili Poetry

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| **Swifa za Mahaba**Nipa loho ya kihindiwino na kalamu kandinikuswifie mapendi.Yameningia moyonikwa sahihi ya ainikana wanja wa machoni.'Takutunza uje kwangukana wa kwanza mwananguyako si nusu wa yangu.Mapendi nikuswifienilo nayo nikwambiemoyoni unangalie.Umejaa pendo lakoLau una kifinikoningalifunua kwako.Kwako ningalifunuwamahaba ukayajuwaya ndani huyapasuwa.Hunipasuwa ya ndaniwala uchungu sionikwa kukupenda fulani.Sururi tunda ya hubayatimupo matilaba    ...    ...heyati takupa hiba.Sikuachi kwa heyatihata yafwate mautina tuishi kwa widati. | http://www.pbs.org/wonders/images/global/spacer.gif | **In Praise of Love**Give me a writing board of Indian wood,ink and a precious pen,let me praise love for you.It has entered my heartforsooth, oh pupil of my eye,you are like cool antimony.I will care for you, come to me,like my eldest child,your love is not half as strong as mine.Let me praise love for youlet me tell you what I feel,so that you can look into my heart.My heart is full of love,if it had a lid,I would open it for you.For you I would open it,so that you would know my love,it is bursting my inmost being.It is splitting my inside,and yet I feel no pain,so much do I love you.Joy is the fruit of love,when my purpose    [to make you love me]    is accomplishedI will give you a present for life.I will not leave you all my life,until death may follow,may we live in mutual affection. |

The first line of this poem is identical with that in many epics. It refers to the ancient method of writing on a wooden tablet, with a calamus, a reed pen. *Wanja* is eye-black, the main ingredient of which is antimony, a metal that has the quality of cooling the eyelids, according to Arabic traditions. It is therefore a frequent term of poetic address to the beloved: 'coolness of my eye'. An eldest child, the first-born, usually receives extra attention in traditionalist families, so the poet compares his love to that of a mother for her first-born. The poet compares his heart to a treasure chest, which he would invite his beloved to look into, if it had a lid. The heart is so full of love that it is bursting open.Source: Four Centuries of Swahili Verse by Jan Knappert. Heinemann, London. 1979.

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| **Nimechoka**Nawasili nipokeyasibadili yako niyatafadhali niridhiyayangu haii nimechokaWangu moyo wanitangakwa surayo kutoenganjoo mbiyo wa muangamwendaniyo nimechoka.Nakwambiya la hakikaNisikiya muhibukaNaumiya kwa mashakakungojeya nimechoka.Nakujuza si dhihakali aziza nakutakaukiweza nielekakujiliza nimechoka. | http://www.pbs.org/wonders/images/global/spacer.gif | **I Am Tired**I have arrived, receive me,do not change your feelings,please do agree to my request,I am tired of my lonely state.My heart is racing inside me,for I cannot see your facecome quickly, shining one,I, your friend, am tired.What I am telling you is true,listen to me, your lover,I am suffering painI am tired of waiting for you.I tell you, and it is no joke,my dearest one, I need you;if you possibly can, come to me,I am tired of crying in loneliness. |

The real quatrain, the epigrammatic poem of four lines, has remained a medium of expression for the poets' philosophical rather than amorous thoughts, as it is in most literary cultures where it is used. In Swahili culture, this type of content keeps the quatrain closely linked, as a form of literary art, to the proverb, of which it is an extended and embellished form. It has never betrayed these origins, since the people of East Africa are still inclined to summarize their experience of life in condensed sentences. Proverbs help to teach the young and the inexperienced; the best way to make memorizing easy is to cast it in poetic form. Swahili scholars spend long hours thinking before achieving a perfect form in their thoughts.Source: Four Centuries of Swahili Verse by Jan Knappert. Heinemann, London. 1979.

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| **Kiswahili**Risala enuka himasikae ukaatwilinina jambo takutumaubalegheshe sualinipate jawabu njemayenye amani na kweli    ...Nauliza Kiswahilini lugha ya watu gani.Lugha nyingi dunianizatamkwa mbalimbalina zote ulimwengunizina wenyewe mahali.    ...Si Hindi si Uzunguni    ...mewaumbia Jalali.    ...Nauliza Kiswahili...Wakamba wana kikwaolugha yao ya aswilina Wazungu pia naowana zao mbalimbalina Wameru wana yaowengini ni Wasomaiindizo matamshi yao.Na yetu ni lugha gani.Wahindi wana Kihindikwa kabila mbali mbalina Wanandi ni Kinandi    ...ndizo zao akuwaliWengine ni Wakilindi    ...wana yao ya aswiliJee hichi Kiswahilini lugha ya watu gani.Kuuliza si ujingamusinifanye sahilinautafuta muangatuzunduane akilindipo shairi 'katungakubaleghesha suali.Nielezwe Kiswahili    ...Ni lugha ya watu gani.Mara nyingi husikiyakuwa hichi Kiswahilihakina mtu mmoyaambaye ni yake kweliNa wagine huteteyaKina wenyewe aswili.Ndipo 'kamba Kiswahili    ...ni lugha ya watu ganiMasai ana kikwaolugha ya tangu azalina Mahara wana yao    ...wengine Mashelisheli    ...na Waluo lugha zaosi sawa na Maragoli    ...Jee hichi Kiswahili...Na jamii wengineowana lugha mbalimbalina kujua za wenzaoni kujifunza ya piliLakini wana na zaolugha za tangu aswili.Jee hichi Kiswahili...Sasa ambalo natakakwa wenye kujua hiliwa Kenya na Tanganyikana walo kila mahalinipani ilo hakikatusifitane ukweliNambiani Kiswahilini lugha ya watu ganiMimi mefikiri mnokuamua jambo hilina 'kaona lugha hinolazima ina aswilikwa sababu kulla nenolina mwanzo wa usuliNdipo 'kamba KiswahiliNi lugha ya watu gani.Na iwapo hivi sivyonilivyoamua hilinioneshani vilivyomudhihirishe ukwelinijue ambavyo ndivyotutoane mushikili    ...Kifunuke Kiswahiliki lugha ya watu gani...Na iwapo atakujawa kunijibu sualinamuomba jambo mojatwambiane kiakilitusionyane miuja    ...jambo lisilokubali.Na nambie Kiswahilini lugha ya watu gani?Tamati ndio ahirijina langu ndilo hiliahamadi wa Nasirina Bhalo ndilo la pilimtungaji mashuhurimpenda msema kweli. | http://www.pbs.org/wonders/images/global/spacer.gif |  **The Swahili Language**Messenger, rise quickly,don't linger, don't dawdle,I have an errand for you,carry my question to the addresseeso that I may receive a good answer,one that gives peace because    it contains the truth:I ask, for what sort of peopleis Swahili the language?There are many languages in the world,pronounced in different ways,and all the languages on earthhave people who belong to them,    in a special placeNot only in India, not only in    Europe and America[but everywhere] has the Almighty    created language.I ask...The Kamba have their own languagewhich has been there since their genesis;and the British too [or the Europeans]have their own several languages;and the Meru people have their own,and the Somali are a different people againand so they have their own language.And which language is ours?The Indians have Hindifor various tribes,and for the Nandi there is    the Nandi language,that is their own speech;and different again are the    people of Usambara,they have their own original language.Tell me, for what sort of peopleis Swahili the language?Asking is not stupidity;do not think that my question is easy,I am searching for light,that we may shake the minds awake,that is why I made a poemin order to communicate this problem.Let it be explained to me,    for what sort of peopleis the Swahili language?One often hearsof this Swahili language, thatthere isn't anyonefor whom it is his own language.And others arguethat it does have original speakers [owners].that is why I am saying,    for what sort of peopleIs Swahili...The Masai has his home languageever since the beginning of Creation,and the people of the island    of Socotra have theirs;the people of the Seychelles    are different again;and the Nilotes have their languages,which are different from those    of the Ragoli people.Tell me, for what sort of people...And all the othershave different languagesand some know the languages of their neighbors,which means studying a second language;but they still have their own languagesever since their origin.Tell me, for what sort of people...Now that which I am asking,from those who know this,the people of Kenya and Tanganyikaand that means those who live everywhere,give me a true answer,let us not hide the truth from one another!Tell me, for what sort of people...I have thought a great dealto solve this problem,and I have realized that this languagemust have an origin;because every wordhas a beginning for its roots.So I say, for what sort of peopleis Swahili...And if this is not so,as I have solved it,show me how it is,make the truth clear,that I may know how it really is,that we may help each other    out of the difficulty!May it be discovered for what sort of peopleis Swahili...And if there arrivesa person who can solve my problem,I beg of him one thing:let us talk together in an intelligent manner,let us not show each other miracles    [throw dust in each other's eyes][by saying] something that is not acceptable.So tell me, for what sort of peopleis Swahili...Finish, this is the end,my name is as follows,Ahmad, son of Nassir,and Bhalo, that is my second surname,a famous poet,a lover and speaker of the truth. |

The very answer to Ahmad's many questions is implied all the time. Swahili is very much his own language; it is the language for everybody in Kenya and Tanganyika (as it then was), a second language for the majority, a first language for some. Gradually, especially in Tanzania, Swahili is replacing the local languages as a result of the nationalist and unitarian feelings of the younger generation. The poem was intended for publication, and the very fact that it is in Swahili, and not in, say, Kamba, Meru, Nandi, Luo or any of the other languages the poet so ably enumerates (forty languages are spoken in Kenya alone, more in Tanzania), shows that Swahili is the one language that everybody knows, be it as a second language. The very question implies the answer: Somali is the language just for the Somali, but Swahili is the language for all.Source: Four Centuries of Swahili Verse by Jan Knappert. Heinemann, London. 1979. |

Class 2 Discussion Questions

General Questions:

1. What stands out to you about this poetic tradition?
2. What makes it different from what you know about Western literature or poetry?
3. What can you learn about the history of Indian Ocean within the context of these poems?
4. What can you learn about a poet’s cultural perspective through their poetry?

Malay/Indonesian Questions:

1. How was Malay/Indonesian language and literature impacted by Indian Ocean trade?
2. How do you interpret Hong’s opinion of poetry?
3. Based on what you know from the Malay/Indonesian language and literature handout, why do you think that poems by Anwar such as “Pines Scatter in the Distance” resonate with many Indonesians today?
4. What is the main takeaway from Father Utih’s story?
5. What are the cultural/historical influences present in these poems?
6. Are there cultural/historical influences that tie all of these poems together?

Persian Questions:

1. How is Persian poetry connected to Indian Ocean trade?
2. Why do you think that Persian poetry has influenced Western poetry or literature?
3. Do you believe that Persian poetry is still relevant today? Why or why not?
4. What topics inspire the Persian poets such as Rumi and Hafiz?
5. What are some similarities and differences between the poetry of Rumi and Hafiz?

Swahili Questions:

1. How was the Swahili language impacted by Indian Ocean trade?
2. What languages have influenced Swahili? Why are they important?
3. Where is Swahili spoken today? Why is this relevant according to “The Swahili Language” by Ahmad?
4. What is the main takeaway from “In Praise of Love?”
5. Do poems such as “In Praise of Love” and “I Am Tired” reflect the history of Indian Ocean trade?
6. Are there cultural/historical influences that tie all of these poems together?

Kipling Handout

**If** was written by Kipling as a tribute to Leander Starr Jameson, a British colonial politician, intended as paternal advice for his son. Written in 1895, it was first published in **Rewards and Fairies** (1910).

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss[es];
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your [or our] turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on [to it] when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
' Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
if neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count [on you,] with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

**The Lament of the Border Cattle Thief** is a ballad of the border between British India and Afghanistan. It was first published in The Week's News, January 21, 1888.

O woe is me for the merry life ‎

I led beyond the Bar,‎

And a treble woe for my winsome wife ‎

That weeps at Shalimar.‎ ‎ ‎

They have taken away my long jezail,‎ ‎

My shield and sabre fine,‎

And heaved me into the Central jail ‎

For lifting of the kine.‎ ‎ ‎

The steer may low within the byre,‎ ‎

The Jat may tend his grain,‎

But there'll be neither loot nor fire ‎

Till I come back again.‎ ‎ ‎

And God have mercy on the Jat ‎

When once my fetters fall,‎

And Heaven defend the farmer's hut ‎

When I am loosed from thrall.‎ ‎ ‎

It's woe to bend the stubborn back ‎

Above the grinching quern,‎

 It's woe to hear the leg-bar clack ‎

And jingle when I turn!‎ ‎ ‎

But for the sorrow and the shame,‎ ‎

The brand on me and mine,‎

I'll pay you back in leaping flame ‎

And loss of the butchered kine.‎ ‎ ‎

For every cow I spared before ‎

In charity set free,‎

If I may reach my hold once more ‎

I'll reive an honest three.‎ ‎

‎For every time I raised the low ‎

That scared the dusty plain,‎

By sword and cord, by torch and tow ‎

I'll light the land with twain!‎ ‎ ‎

Ride hard, ride hard to Abazai,‎ ‎

Young Sahib with the yellow hair,‎

Lie close, lie close as khuttucks lie,‎ ‎

Fat herds below Bonair!‎ ‎ ‎

The one I'll shoot at twilight-tide,‎ ‎

At dawn I'll drive the other;‎

The black shall mourn for hoof and hide,‎ ‎

The white man for his brother.‎ ‎

 ‎‎'Tis war, red war, I'll give you then,‎ ‎

War till my sinews fail;‎

For the wrong you have done to a chief of men,‎ ‎

And a thief of the Zukka Kheyl.‎ ‎

And if I fall to your hand afresh ‎

I give you leave for the sin,‎

That you cram my throat with the foul pig's flesh,‎ ‎

And swing me in the skin!‎

Tagore Handout

**Freedom**

Freedom from fear is the freedom
I claim for you my motherland!
Freedom from the burden of the ages, bending your head,
breaking your back, blinding your eyes to the beckoning
call of the future;
Freedom from the shackles of slumber wherewith
you fasten yourself in night’s stillness,
mistrusting the star that speaks of truth’s adventurous paths;
freedom from the anarchy of destiny
whole sails are weakly yielded to the blind uncertain winds,
and the helm to a hand ever rigid and cold as death.
Freedom from the insult of dwelling in a puppet’s world,
where movements are started through brainless wires,
repeated through mindless habits,
where figures wait with patience and obedience for the
master of show,
to be stirred into a mimicry of life.

**Go Not to the Temple**

Go not to the temple to put flowers upon the feet of God,
First fill your own house with the Fragrance of love...

Go not to the temple to light candles before the altar of God,
First remove the darkness of sin from your heart...

Go not to the temple to bow down your head in prayer,
First learn to bow in humility before your fellowmen...

Go not to the temple to pray on bended knees,
First bend down to lift someone who is down-trodden. ..

Go not to the temple to ask for forgiveness for your sins,
First forgive from your heart those who have sinned against you.

**Gitanjali 35**

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

   Where knowledge is free;

   Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

   Where words come out from the depth of truth;

   Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

   Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

   Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action

   Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Kipling vs. Tagore Discussion Questions

**Primary Learning Objectives**

-Examining how cultural perspectives and regional history shaped the poets’ narratives (especially within the context of India)

-Understanding the role of intercultural exchange as reflected by the poets in their texts (e.g. themes, imagery, conveyed meaning, etc.)

1. What do both poets take away from living in India?
2. What are the different perspectives of Kipling and Tagore? Are there any similarities?
3. How do differences between the viewpoints of Kipling and Tagore relate to Indian Ocean history?
4. Do you find there to be differences in poetic styles between the two?
5. To what extent has Indian culture impacted Kipling’s life and to what extent has British culture impacted Tagore’s life?

Ghosh Excerpts

(Source [Critical Perspective]: British Council Literature)

Critical perspective of Ghosh’s Writing

Amitav Ghosh’s writing deals in the epic themes of travel and diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence, love and loss, while all the time crossing the generic boundaries between anthropology and art work.

Both his fictional and non-fictional narratives tend to be transnational in sweep, moving restlessly across countries, continents and oceans. Formidably learned and meticulously researched, there is something equally epic about the scale of scholarship that sits behind each of his books. However, Ghosh never loses sight of the intimate human dimension of things. It is no coincidence that his writing ritually returns to Calcutta (the author’s birth place), and, for all its global ambition, is thickly accented by the registers and referents of Bengali and South Asian culture.

Ghosh’s first novel is typical in this sense. At the centre of *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is Alu, an eight-year-old Bengali boy with a huge head, “curiously uneven, bulging all over with knots and bumps”. These bodily deformities, along with the series of coincidences and connections that emerges between Alu’s personal life and the political world around him, have led to obvious comparisons with Rushdie’s Booker of Bookers, *Midnight’s Children*. However, this is in some ways unfortunate as the novel has its own integrity and ambition, from its philosophical exploration of reason to its peripatetic wanderings across South Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. Ghosh’s beautifully written second novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988), is also reminiscent of Rushdie in terms of its formal experimentations with geography and chronology. However, unlike Rushdie, it is written in an understated, condensed prose that comes close to poetry. The novel deals with the invention of the past and the arbitrariness of partition as it moves between India and the UK, Calcutta and London, the Second World War and present. The title is an allusion to Joseph Conrad’s novella, *The Shadow Line*, and while its precise relationship to Conrad’s text is oblique and shadowy, both share a preoccupation with the threshold between East and West, and with the ghostly hauntings of imperial memory. More generally, Ghosh’s second novel draws inspiration from diverse modern European and Indian texts from Proust to Tagore, Ford Madox Ford to Satjajit Ray.

Even this sort of promiscuous intertextuality comes to appear tame and provincial within the context of Amitav Ghosh’s next work, *In An Antique Land* (1992). Ostensibly a work of non-fiction, the book draws heavily on the author’s training in anthropology, but ultimately defies generic pigeon holes. Combining autobiography, fiction, travel writing and history, *In An Antique Land* is a delicate, vivid and deeply moving evocation of Egypt since the twelfth century.

The strong emphasis on history, memory and the past that has by this stage become a trademark of Ghosh’s writing is given a fresh twist in his next book, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), a work of science fiction set in the near future. Ghosh’s flirtation with the popular genre of the thriller in *The Calcutta Chromosome* marks a radical departure from the various sorts of archive fever and scholarly self-consciousness that readers typically associate with the author. When Antar, an office worker in New York, discovers a discarded ID card, it leads him on an investigative journey to Calcutta at the close of the nineteenth century. However, beneath this thin veneer of pulp, is a novel with as intricate a plot line as anything in Ghosh.

After the pleasurable melodrama of *The Calcutta Chromosome*,*The Glass Palace* (2000) strikes the reader as one of Ghosh’s most subtle and elusive works. Sprawling across three generations of the same family and moving from Burma and Malaya to India and the United States, if this novel has a centre it is RajKumar Raha, a shipwrecked sailor boy whose rags to riches story is counterpointed with that of the Burmese royal family. Built on the same sort of formidable research that made *In an Antique Land* a classic, Minna Proctor’s review of the novel captures something of the book’s vicarious pleasures:

'When you heave your final sigh and turn the last page of Amitav Ghosh's new novel, *The Glass Palace*, you feel as if you've travelled for 100 years on foot, through the most distant and lush lands on the globe. *The Glass Palace* is as close as a person tucked cozily into an armchair on a rainy day can get to the rubber plantations of Malaysia, the teak forests of Burma, and the bustling city streets of Rangoon and Singapore, bearing witness to the demise of the Burmese monarchy and the rise and fall of the British Empire. A stately and vibrantly detailed family saga set in south-central Asia against the tumultuous backdrop of the 20th century.'

In his next work of fiction, *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Ghosh evokes a shadow line that in certain respects overshadows even that of his second novel. The Sundarbans is a vast area of mangrove forest on the Eastern coast of India, much of it submerged, and spreading, with little respect for human geography across India and Bangladesh. A borderless, hostile, transitional zone that is neither land nor water, this enveloped and treacherous landscape forms an unlikely backdrop to this hypnotic tale of adventure and love.

*Sea of Poppies* (2008) marks the opening of an epic trilogy that combines and extends Ghosh’s established interests in the global histories of diaspora, movement and migration. The novel is set aboard the ‘Ibis’, an old slaving ship whose crew combines a series of shady figures, mariners, renegades and castaways in a voyage across the Indian Ocean. Comparing *Sea of Poppies* favourably with both Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad, John Thieme has said that ‘…if Amitav Ghosh can sustain its brilliance in the two remaining parts, his ‘Ibis’ trilogy will surely come to be regarded as one of the masterpieces of twenty-first century fiction’.

Dr James Procter, 2009

Confessions of a Xenophile by Amitav Ghosh

To be here today is a matter of the greatest pleasure for me, because next to my own country, India, there is no place in the world that has been more important to my development as a writer than Egypt. It is now nearly twenty-eight years since I first landed in Cairo, on April 19 ,1980: I was then twenty-four years old, and I had come to explore what was to me a new, but not entirely unknown world. The immediate pretext for my journey was research: a short while before I had won a scholarship that took me from Delhi University to Oxford, to study social anthropology. My dream was of writing fiction, but like many an aspiring novelist I felt I lacked the necessary richness of experience. The writers I admired – V.S.Naipaul, James Baldwin and others – had gone out into the world and watched it go by: I wanted no less for myself. The scholarship was a godsend because it allowed me to choose where I wanted to go and in my case it was Egypt. Through the good offices of Dr. Aly Issa, an eminent anthropologist from Alexandria, I was soon installed in a small village in the Governorate of Beheira, near the town of Damanhour: in my book In An Antique Land I gave this village the name Lataifa. My home there consisted of a recently-vacated chicken coop on the roof of a mud hut; at the time there was no electricty, although there was, as I recall, a supply of piped water.

Lataifa and I were undeniably a shock to each other. There was the question of language to begin with: I spoke very little Arabic, and what I knew was of a laboriously classical variety. Thus even simple operations, such as asking for water, could cause great outbursts of laughter. In the process however my hosts and I discovered one medium of communication where we were on equal terms: this was the language of aflaam al-Hindeyya – that is to say, Hindi film songs. When all other efforts at communication broke down, we would burst into song – this was no small accomplishment on my part as I am a terrible singer. But many of the younger people in the village sang very well and knew innumerable Hindi songs. Indian filmi music thus became a shared language and opened many barriers and earned me many invitations to meals. The Hindi films that were best known in Lataifa were of the fifties vintage – films that featured such stars as Raj Kapoor, Nargis, Padmini, Manoj Kumar and Babita. The good-hearted vamp and cabaret dancer, Helen, was another well-known figure. Everyone in the village had a few favourite scenes and I would often be asked detailed questions about these episodes. This was a great trial to me, as I was by no means an expert on the films of the fifties. Often children would be called out to perform, which they would do with the greatest gusto. There were even minor specializations, some boys being regarded as particularly good performers of Raj Kapoor numbers, while others were experts in reciting dialogues and soliloquies. The performers were almost always boys as I remember, and it was quite a sight to see young jallabeyya-clad fellaheen attempting to imitate the dance numbers of scantily-dressed actresses like Helen. Even more astonishing, were the recitations, for it would happen sometimes that children would recite large chunks of Hindi dialogue without knowing a word of the language. Hindi films also provided me with a certain name-recognition, for although the mega-star Amitabh Bachhan was not as well-known in the Middle East then as he is now, there were plenty of people who knew of him. It was thus not as difficult as it might have been to introduce myself.

Yet, while I had reason to be grateful to Hindi films in some respects, there were others in which they made my life exceedingly difficult. One of these was the matter of cows. I must admit that until I went to live in Lataifa I had no idea that cows played such an important part in Indian films: from the recurrence of this animal in everyday conversation, one might well have imagined that Bollywood is a veterinary enterprise, and that cows rather than Raj Kapoor and his ilk, were the true stars of Hindi films. Every day, several times daily, I would have to deal with barrages of questions on the matter of cows: did I worship cows (inta bita’abud bi bagara? – literally ‘are you a devotee of the cow?’) At what time of day did I conduct my devotions? Could they please witness my prostrations? Was there not a risk of being splattered with dung? Had I ever considered transferring my allegiance to the camel? And so on. Although these interrogations were often wearisome, there was also something touching about the attitudes of my friends. When we were out walking in the fields they would slow their pace when we were passing a cow: it took me a while to understand that they were allowing me time to perform my secret oblations. In the ploughing season, it often happened that we would pass a field where a team of oxen was being driven on with a stick or a whip: on many such occasions my friends would run ahead to berate the poor ploughman, telling him to stop beating his animals for fear of hurting the sentiments of Doktor Amitaab. In vain would I try to persuade them that cows were frequently beaten in India: they wouldn’t believe me, for they had not seen otherwise in Hindi films? The other principal association that rural Egypt had with India, was the matter of water-pumps, which were of course very important in rural communities. In those days Egypt imported so many water pumps from India that in some areas these machines were known as makana Hindi – or simply as Kirloskar, from the name of a major pump-manufacturing company. The purchasing of a water pump was a great event, and the machine would be brought back on a pick-up truck, with much fanfare, with strings of old shoes strung around the spout to ward off the Evil Eye. Long before the machine made its entry into the village, a posse of children would be sent to summon me: as an Indian I was expected to be an expert on these machines, and the proud new owners would wait anxiously for me to pronounce on the virtues and failings of their new acquisition. Now it so happens that I am one of those people who is hard put to tell a spanner from a hammer or a sprocket from a gasket. At first I protested vigorously, disclaiming all knowledge of machinery. But here again, no one believed me; they thought I was witholding vital information or playing some kind of deep and devious game. Often people would look crestfallen, imagining, no doubt, that I had detected a fatal flaw in their machine and was refusing to divulge the details. This would not do of course, and in order to set everyone’s fears at rest, I became, willy-nilly, an oracle of water-pumps. I developed a little routine, where I would subject the machine to a minute inspection, occasionally tapping it with my knuckles or poking it with my fingers. Fortunately no machine failed my inspection: at the end of it I would invariably pronounce the water-pump to be a makana mumtaaza – a most excellent Kirloskar, a truly distinguished member of its species.

Yet, even as I was disclaiming my relationship to those water-pumps, I could not but recognize that there was a certain commonality between myself and those machines. In a way my presence in that village could be attributed to the same historical circumstances that introduced Indian pumps and Indian films to rural Egypt. Broadly speaking, those circumstances could be described as the spirit of decolonization that held sway over much of the world in the decades after the Second World War; this was the political ethos that found its institutional representation in the Non-Aligned Movement. We are at a very different moment in history now, when the words Non-Aligned seem somehow empty and discredited; today the movement is often dismissed not just as a political failure, but as a minor footnote to the great power rivalries of the Cold War. It is true of course, that the movement had many shortcomings and met with many failures. Yet it is also worth remembering that the Non-Aligned Movement as such was merely the institutional aspect of something that was much broader, wider and more powerful: this, as I said before, was the post-war ethos of decolonization, which was a political impulse that had deep historical roots and powerful cultural resonances. In the field of culture, among other things, it represented an attempt to restore and recommence the exchanges and conversations that had been interrupted by the long centuries of European imperial dominance. It was in this sense, the necessary and vital counterpart of the nationalist idiom of anti-colonial resistance. In the West Third World nationalism is often presented as an ideology of xenophobia and parochialism. But the truth is that many of these movements of resistance tried very hard, within their limited means, to create an universalism of their own. Those of us who grew up in that period will recall how powerfully we were animated by an emotion that is rarely named: this is xenophilia, the love of the other, the affinity for strangers - a feeling that lives very deep in the human heart, but whose very existence is rarely acknowledged. People of my generation will recall the pride we once took in the trans-national friendships of such figures as Nehru, Nasser, Nkrumah, Sukarno, Chou En Lai and others. Nor were friendships of this kind anything new. I have referred above to the cross-cultural conversations that were interrupted by imperialism. These interruptions were precisely that – temporary breakages – the conversations never really ceased. Even in the 19th century, the high noon of Empire, people from Africa, Asia and elsewhere, sought each other out, wrote letters to each other, and stayed in each other’s homes while traveling. Lately, a great number of memoirs and autobiographies have been published that attest to the depth and strength of these ties. It was no accident therefore that Mahatma Gandhi chose to stop in Egypt, in order to see Sa’ad Zaghloul before proceeding to the Round Table Conference in London. This was integral to the ethos of the time. Similarly, it is no accident that capitals like New Delhi, Abuja and Tunis have many roads that are named after leaders from other continents. Sometimes these names are unpronounceable to local tongues and then they cause annoyance or laughter, and invite dismissal as empty gestures. But the fact that such gestures are not without value becomes apparent when we reflect that we would search in vain for roads that are named in this fashion in such supposedly global cities as London, New York and Berlin. These gestures, in other words, may be imbued with both pomposity and pathos, but they are not empty: they represent a yearning to reclaim an interrupted cosmopolitanism.

If I am to think of what drew me to Egypt in 1980, it was, at bottom, the very impulse that I have been describing here – a kind of xenophilia, a desire to reclaim the globe in my own fashion, a wish to eavesdrop on an ancient civilizational conversation. Admittedly, this impulse could have taken me to many other places, but the opportunity presented itself at a time when I was just becoming aware of the ties that had once linked Yemen and China, Indonesia and East Africa – and most significantly for me, India and the Middle East. As one of the centres of the world, Egypt has always had a special attraction for travelers and it seemed natural that this was where I would come. Thus it happened that in 1980 I found myself living in a small village in the governorate of Beheira.

I have said earlier that the Non-aligned Movement was merely the institutional aspect of a much broader and older cultural and political tendency. But it needs to be acknowledged here that neither I nor any of the other elements of India that were present in rural Beheira – the pumps and the Hindi film songs – would have been able to find a place there if not for the existence of the Non-aligned Movement. In its absence the people of Lataifa would not have known of any foreign films other than those produced by Hollywood; their water pumps would have been of European or Japanese make; and as for myself, I would either have failed to get a visa or would not have been permitted to reside in the countryside. It was only because of the good relations that prevailed between India and Egypt that I was able to do what I did. It is important I think to acknowledge this, for no matter how sincere an individual’s desire for cultural communication might be, it is impossible for such exchanges to occur in the absence of an institutional framework. In other words, it was decolonization and its aftermath that made it possible for me to live for a time in Egypt. I say this in a spirit of the deepest gratitude for this experience was critical to my development as a writer: it was my equivalent of writing school. While living in Beheira I maintained a detailed journal, in which I made extensive notes about my conversations with people, and the things I saw around me. Not only did this teach me to observe what I was seeing; it also taught me how to translate raw experience on to the page. It was the best kind of training a novelist could have and it has stood me in good stead over the years. Much of my writing has been influenced by this experience.

For any writer, reading is as essential as writing, and in this regard too, my time in Egypt was absolutely essential to my literary formation. Although I have always been a voracious reader, I have never in all my life, read as much as I did in Lataifa. This was possible partly because there was not much else to do: like most rural communities, Lataifa was a quiet place where nothing much happened. It was in Lataifa that I read Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude and I would not perhaps have felt its influence as powerfully as I did if I had not been living there. One Hundred Years of Solitude alerted me to the possibility that the movement of time may most often be felt most powerfully in places that appear to be far removed from the main currents of history: Lataifa was one such place, an Egyptian Macondo. It was in Lataifa also that I discovered contemporary Arabic fiction. I had of course, heard the names of such writers as Taha Hussein and Tawfiq al-Hakim, but their work had a special resonance because I was living in a place that was so much like those they described. A writer who was to prove particularly significant to me was Tayyib al-Salih: his novel, Mowsam al-Hijra ila ash-Shimaal (‘Season of Migration to the North’) was to have a powerful influence on my own work. Dislocation and migration, the crossing of boundaries and borders are central to this novel, and these were themes which resonated very powerfully with me: my first novel, The Circle of Reason, was about a group of migrant workers who travel from India to the Gulf, and it reflects some of the same concerns that Tayyib al-Salih addresses in his seminal book.

And then of course there was the towering figure of Naguib Mahfouz. To me, as to many others the world over, the situations and characters that Mahfouz wrote about were instantly recognizable, intimately familiar. One reason for this is that Mahfouz’s entry into the world of his characters is often through the interior passageways of the family. Of course the family is a one of those territories the novel, as a form, has most successfully claimed for itself everywhere: all around the world there are novelists, who, like Mahfouz, build their books on families and their histories, on the endless cycle of birth, marriage and death. But in Mahfouz’s hands this invitation into the family has an extra dimension of excitement. This is because in Egypt, as in India, the family is often a secret, curtained world, protected from the gaze of outsiders by walls and courtyards, by veils and laws of silence. To be taken past those doors, into the forbidden space of failed marriages and secret desires, the areas that lie most heavily curtained under the genteel ethic of family propriety, is to prepare oneself for the the pleasurable tingle of the illicit. And once past that curtain we discover, with an almost-guilty delight, a quiet murmur of furtive gropings, dissatisfaction, and despair that confirms everything that one has ever suspected about one’s neighbours – no matter whether they be in Calcutta or Cairo. In Mahfouz’s hands the intricacies of family relationships become a kind of second language, with which he demonstrates the dangers that lurk at the margins of a world that strives for an unattainable respectability in circumstances of poverty and deprivation. The predicaments he presents are the stuff of life in the crowded, teeming cities of India as well as Egypt: this is a world of despair, aspiration, and hypocrisy, where people look for meaning and authenticity while being marooned between great wealth and unimaginable poverty.

Over the years, although I have forgotten much of my Arabic, my work and my understanding of the world have been greatly enriched by many other Arab writers: Nawaal al-Sa’adawi, Abdel Rahman Munif, Gamal al-Ghitani, Elias Khoury, and Ghassan Kanafani, whose Men in the Sun I consider to be one of the finest works of post-war fiction. It is possible that I would have discovered these writers even if I had not lived in Lataifa, but I doubt that my readings of their work would have had the same resonance if I had not lived in Egypt.

The world today is very different from that of 1980, when I came to Egypt. The conversations and exchanges that re-commenced in the post-war period are now in danger of being broken off again. Today, especially in the Anglo-American world, capitalism and empire are once again being packaged together, in a bundle that is scarcely distinguishable from the old ‘civilizing mission’. Indeed one of the outcomes of the horrifying attacks of 9/11 was that it led to an extraordinary rehabilitation of imperialism, not merely as a political and military force, but also as an ideology – one that has led to the unfolding catastrophe in Iraq.

It is strange to think that the fall of the Berlin Wall is still widely read as a vindication of ‘capitalism’. The truth is that the world’s experience over these last fifteen years could more accurately be read as proof that untramelled capitalism leads inevitably to imperial wars and the expansion of empires. If that were not the case, then surely the almost-uncontested reign of a single system would prove to be an epoch, if not of universal peace, then certainly one in which there would be a broad agreement on the means of ensuring peace? Yet what we see is exactly the opposite. We find ourselves in a period of extraordinary instability and fear, faced with the prospect of an endless proliferation of thinly-veiled colonial wars. In fact there is less agreement on the means of ensuring peace today than there was at the time of the founding of the United Nations.

Empires always profess, and sometimes even believe in, noble ideals: the problem lies with their methods, which are invariably such as to subvert their stated aims and ends. This is because the processes of conquest, occupation and domination create realities that become alibis for the permanent deferral of the professed ideals. Thus did some Jacobins argue for the necessity of slavery in France’s colonies; thus did the author of ‘On Liberty’ preside over hundreds of millions of conquered Indians; thus does torture come to be reconciled to the promise of liberty. None of this is new. Let us recall that the slave trade in the 18th century – arguably the foundational commerce of speculative capitalism – was long justified on the grounds that it bestowed freedom on Africans by removing them from the tyrannies of their native continent; let us recall that the export of opium to China, enforced by Western arms, was justified in the name of ‘Free Trade’.

The packaging of capital+empire is still beribboned with these processes of double-think. Those who set out to remake the world in their own image will not be satisfied with an imperfect portrait; for them the flaws in the depiction will be an invitation to rip up the old copy and start again. And since no copy will ever be as good as the original, the process will repeat itself again and again. Capitalism+empire is in other words, a program for permanent war – the prospect once beloved of Trostkyists, and now embraced afresh by neo-conservatives. Yet this is not the whole picture, for the West is not a monolith: even within the Anglo-American world there are powerful forces of resistance to the neo-imperialist model of politics, and as for Europe it has charted an entirely different course, in which negotiation and compromise have been given much greater value than confrontation and force.

Empires are not the sole threat to the continuation of our conversations: over the last fifteen years, in many parts of Asia and Africa, we have seen a dramatic rise in violent and destructive kinds of fundamentalism, some religious, and some linguistic. These movements are profoundly hostile to any notion of dialogue between cultures, faiths and civilizations. They are movements of intolerance and bigotry and they mirror the ideology of imperialism in that they seek to remake the world – or at least their corners of it – in their own images. What is more they are deeply and viscerally hostile to all forms of the arts: just as Mahfouz was attacked by Muslim fundamentalists in Egypt, so too in India, have Hindu fundamentalists attacked museums and libraries, exhibitions and artists. If these fundamentalists – no matter of what stripe - are allowed to have their way it is not merely conversation that will cease; art itself will no longer be tolerated.

Against this background it is tempting to look back on the days of non-alignment with some nostalgia: and indeed there was much that was valuable in that period. Yet it would be idle to pretend that solutions could be found by looking backwards in time. That was a certain historical moment and it has passed. If I have reflected on it here, it is not in order to suggest that we should try to turn back the clock – as religious fundamentalists seek to do – nor in order to fall back on an ideology of permanent victimhood such as that which the French rightly castigate as ‘tiers-mondisme’. I have pointed to that period rather, in order to evoke the desires and hopes that animated it, in particular to its strain of xenophilia, to its yearning for a certain kind of universalism – not a universalism merely of principles and philosophy, but one of face-to-face encounters, of everyday experience. Except that this time we must correct the mistake that lay at the heart of that older anti-colonial impulse – which is that we must not only include the West within this spectrum of desire, we must also acknowledge that both the West and we ourselves have been irreversibly changed by our encounter with each other. We must recognize that in the West, as in Asia, Africa and elsewhere, there are great numbers of people who, by force of circumstance, have become xenophiles, in the deepest sense, of acknowledging – as Tayyib Salih did so memorably in Mowsam al-Hijra ila-ash-Shimaal - that in matters of language, culture and civilization, their heritage, like ours, is fragmented, fissured and incomplete. Only when our work begins to embody the conflicts, the pain, the laughter, and the yearning that comes from this incompleteness will our work be a true mirror of the world we live in.

Al-Harthi Excerpts

(Source [News Article]: The Guardian)

**Alharthi News Article:**

**The first Omani woman translated in English and winner of the Man Booker International prize reflects on her ‘lucky book’ Celestial Bodies and Oman’s uneasy relationship with its history**

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[](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jul/08/jokha-alharthi-a-lot-of-women-are-really-strong-even-though-they-are-slaves%22%20%5Cl%20%22img-1)

Jokha Alharthi, the first female Omani novelist to be translated into English, has won the Man Booker International prize for her novel Celestial Bodies. Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

**J**okha Alharthi’s second novel, [*Celestial Bodies*](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/02/celestial-bodies-jokha-alharthi-review), may have its roots in rural Oman – its irrigation canals and high desert nights, its cool back rooms and busy courtyards – but it was born in Edinburgh. Alharthi was studying for a PhD at the university, she had an eight-month-old baby, and she and her husband had had difficulty finding a place to live and so were renting a small flat from week to week. Her stress was compounded by the fact that, although her PhD was in classical Arabic poetry, she was expected “to write *fluent* English, and to write *fluent* essays, and I was like, I never did that! I *never* did that. So I just came back to the flat one night and got the baby to sleep, and just sat there with my laptop thinking about – not exactly Oman, but a different life, and a different language. And because I love my language so much, I felt the need to write in my own language. So I just started writing.” She had already published one book, *Dream*, “a love story, kind of”, and for a long time had been thinking of another, with snatches of ideas and characters and places. “It wasn’t all clear in my mind, but I kept thinking about them, and also about the traditional ways, which are rapidly vanishing in Oman.” But she “hadn’t started yet, until that moment, when it was a *really* difficult moment for me. So it was like going back to my mother’s womb again, to feel warm, and secure. The novel – I don’t want to say it saved me, it’s a big word – but kind of.”

Just over a decade later, in May this year, *Celestial Bodies* won the International Man Booker prize. Alharthi beat finalists including last year’s winner, Polish bestseller [Olga Tokarczuk](https://www.theguardian.com/books/olga-tokarczuk), and joined previous winners including Korean author [Han Kang](https://www.theguardian.com/books/han-kang); it was the first book from any Arab country to win. We meet the morning after, in a bright many windowed room on the top floor of the headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects in central London. Alharthi sits next to her translator, Marilyn Booth, who remembers that the translation, too, began in Edinburgh: Alharthi had not yet finished her PhD when her supervisor retired, and Booth took over (she is now professor in the study of the contemporary Arab world at Oxford). “She brought me her novel. And I just really loved it, and wanted to translate it.” Booth was so keen that she completed the translation before they had a publisher lined up, “which is not always a good idea”, she says. *Celestial Bodies* is the first novel by an Omani woman ever translated into English, and the prize, £50,000, is split equally between them.

[](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jul/08/jokha-alharthi-a-lot-of-women-are-really-strong-even-though-they-are-slaves%22%20%5Cl%20%22img-2)

Jokha Alharthi with translator Marilyn Booth at a ceremony for the Man Booker International prize in May 2019. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

The book tells the story of three generations of a family from a village called al-Awafi. There are three daughters, their father and mother, their children and their husbands’ parents. The birth of a child called London (the capital of a foreign city, a Christian city no less, whisper appalled neighbours and relatives) is the hub from which all sorts of spokes radiate, then spin with speed and impressive control: within six pages we have been presented with an animating tragedy, and a memorable account of a woman giving birth, “standing as tall as a grand mare”. Alharthi’s characters are pleasingly contradictory and fallible, irreducibly individual. A doting new father brings cases of baby food for an unweaned infant, an act that is “unnecessary and slightly disgraceful”; a former slave locked away as “mad” by an embarrassed daughter calls out, whenever she hears a noise in the courtyard, “I’m here, I’m here, I’m Masoud and I’m in here”.

To say that *Celestial Bodies* is a multi-generational saga simplifies what Alharthi has done, which is also to tell the story of how Oman has changed over the last century, from a traditional rural patriarchal society where Islam was complemented by Zār spirit worship, and which was among the last countries in the world to abolish slavery (in 1970), to an urban, oil-rich Gulf state. And she has done so in a form that shifts from voice to voice, viewpoint to viewpoint, decade to decade, sometimes within a single paragraph or sentence. It is no surprise that, as well as 10th-century Arabic poets such as Abū al-Tayyib Ahmad ibn Husayn al-Mutanabbī, and the more recent Mahmoud Darwish, Alharthi counts among her favourite writers Gabriel García Márquez, Milan Kundera, Yukio Mishima, Yasunari Kawabata and Anton Chekhov, and that the first piece of fiction she published, at 18, was a short story. She has since written three collections of stories, which have been translated into five languages, as well as children’s books.

What attracts us to literature is not that it’s familiar to us, it’s that we can relate to the universal value in it

*Celestial Bodies* was first published in 2010, and it has been a “lucky book” says Alharthi, who is 40 and is in person as direct and unshowily confident as her prose. “I think books are like people, some have lucky lives, and this book got a lot of attention.” The critics loved it, a master’s thesis has been written about it, and last year a critical study. She does almost all of our interview in fluent and authoritative English, but now she turns to Booth: “I want to say this in Arabic if you don’t mind, to put this in precise words – I don’t want to get it wrong.” “Some people feel that touching upon a sensitive topic like slavery is stirring up the past in a way that isn’t appropriate now,” says Booth after a moment, “because Oman is another country, and slavery is something of the past. But she’s saying that that’s what literature does – it’s to think about the past, to think about history.”

Alharthi grew up immersed in history and especially in Arabic literature. An uncle was a poet and travel writer; her grandfather was a poet who “when I was a child, in every situation would recite verses from Al-Mutanabbī to justify his position” – just as one of her characters, Azzan, does, to his beautiful Bedouin lover, who finds it increasingly alienating and irritating. Booth, who studies modern Arabic language and culture, and whose Arabic is in fact Egyptian Arabic (she has never been to Oman, and had to ask Alharthi to send her photos of typically Omani things she had not come across before), found these poems, with their double meanings and referents that stretch a thousand years into the past, by far the most challenging sections to translate. “She hated me for it!” laughs Alharthi.

[](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jul/08/jokha-alharthi-a-lot-of-women-are-really-strong-even-though-they-are-slaves%22%20%5Cl%20%22img-3)

Alharthi lives in Muscat with her husband and three children. She teaches classical Arabic literature at Sultan Qaboos University. Photograph: Alamy

When Alharthi’s mother was growing up in the village of Al-Qabil there was no schooling beyond basic reading and writing for anyone, male or female, unless you went to the capital, Muscat, so she taught herself poetry, reciting it as she went about her daily chores. By the time Alharthi and her siblings were born things had changed, though there still wasn’t a kindergarten, so her father, who was the local governor, forged their birth certificates so they could start school early. “He thought we were too smart to sit at home.” Alharthi, who now lives in Muscat and teaches classical Arabic literature at Sultan Qaboos University, is one of eight sisters and four brothers. And where do you come? “OK, let me see,” she counts them off on her fingers, under her breath. “I think I’m number four.” The others have gone on to work in a wide range of jobs, from oil company employee to a brother in the foreign ministry and a sister who runs a communications company. Alharthi herself is married to a civil engineer and they have three children.

One of the many striking things in *Celestial Bodies* is the way Alharthi refuses easy assumptions about power, and people’s roles in the world. There is a moment, for instance, where she focuses on the childhood of one of the main characters, a matriarch, Salima, who started off as a poor female relative. Then she was not allowed to eat or be clothed as an equal with rich relatives, but at the same time she was not allowed to mix with the servants, to bathe like them, or dance as the slave girls do. Adult Salima cannot abide Zarifa, a former slave from her son-in-law’s family, who runs the household, has the love and devotion of her supposed master and his son, and has the power in all but name. “For me it’s always complicated,” says Alharthi, “the relationships are complicated, and people claim their authority wherever they are. A lot of women are really strong, even though they are slaves actually, but they still can be strong.” Each chapter is named after the person from whose point of view it is told, but it is interesting that the only one who speaks in the first person is a man, Abdallah – again supposedly the inheritor of riches, a businessman, the head of his household, the man in a man’s world who ought to have all the power. “But Abdallah doesn’t!” says Alharthi, partly because of old hurts, partly because of the intensity with which he loves someone who does not love him back, partly because his world is changing so fast, partly because of the strength of the women who surround him. “You’d assume that the first-person character is the one who’s got some authority,” adds Booth, “and he’s really the most vulnerable.”

How does Alharthi feel about the much wider readership this prize might give her? She is silent for a while. “I don’t know, it is strange … *yanni*” – she turns again to Booth; English phrases pop like bubbles out of urgent Arabic. “It’s wonderful to have a bigger readership,” says Booth at last, “and to have readers everywhere, but it’s also a slightly strange feeling, because these are characters that came out of her mind. They developed within her own thinking and they’re going out into the world and other people are reading about them and thinking about them, and it’s slightly hard to let go.” Or, as Salima says about her daughters: “We raise them so that strangers can take them away.” There is the further point of culture, says Alharthi, which is that “when it was published in Arabic, the Arabic audience in general and the Omani audience in particular can easily relate to the novel” – and non-Arabs cannot really be expected to feel the same sense of recognition. “But I still think that what attracts us to literature is not that it’s familiar to us, it’s that we can relate to the universal value in it. Even if it has a very strong *mahaliya*” – “localness”, supplies Booth – “still I hope that international readers can relate to the universal values in it.”

**Alharthi Short Story:**

**The Wedding**

                **Translated by: Ibtihaj Alharthi**

The wedding hall is huge and the bridal throne is decorated with countless flowers and white and pink curtains. Women are sitting in circles around the tables. *Saloma* is sitting on her chair with a straight back, her head neither raised nor inclined. Her hands are placed on her lap, filled with golden, and silver rings, bracelets and beads. Her feet with their anklets are rooted to the ground. On her lips, a vague smile, as if of content and blessing. Her look is languidly directed, on a vertical dimension, barely blinking, to the bride. During the wedding, which stretched to more than two hours, *Saloma* never left her seat, never lifted a limb, never changed her content smile or her confident posture, as if she had been born to sit in that chair, as if she had not lived anywhere but in this hall, as if *Saloma*had existed since eternity; her existence seemed as endless as it always will be.

*Saloma*, who had been married to at least ten men, never had a wedding like this. She did not sit on a bridal throne with swinging curtains. It never occurred to any of her grooms to sit next to her and hold her hand in front of everybody else. Every time she was wedded, she was covered from head to toe with a heavy scarf. The scarf was always embroidered with gold threads, or sometimes simply plain green, depending on how rich the groom was. Her body would be squeezed between the bodies of singing, buzzing women. She would be directly taken from her house to his, where there would be a small rag in a corner of the house. She would sit on it, unable to breathe because of the heaviness of her green scarf. Women would sit around her in circles on the ground in front of plates of *halwa*[[1]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1%22%20%5Co%20%22) and kettles of bitter coffee. As soon as the men’s parade appeared, the women would prepare to leave the house. The bride and the groom would be left alone now. Only he would look at her sultry eyes, look at the storm of bracelets, necklaces, amulets, silver, gold, and colored plastic bracelets under which *Saloma*never faltered.

On this night, on this chair made especially for her, *Saloma* shines. Her eyes are sultrily loose, either spontaneously or deliberately, and fixed on the bride. Her *ikfa*[[2]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn2%22%20%5Co%20%22) shows the size of her braids under the embroidered scarf. Her gold nose-stud, shaped like a flower, is an inseparable part of her nose. And her confidence … *Aah*her confidence. There is no doubt that her nine chickens are asleep now. She cleaned their nests and collected the eggs early in the morning. She gave them her lunch leftovers before preparing for the wedding. Then, she boarded the guest’s bus that headed directly to the wedding hall in the Omani Women’s Society in Muscat.

Her faint smile does not leave her face and only a small number of wrinkles show around her mouth. No …no! There is no sarcasm in this smile, but content and blessing. She earned several *Rials* from selling fresh eggs, and the *dishdasha*[[3]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn3%22%20%5Co%20%22) she is wearing is the only gift from her daughter who visits her once every *Eid*. Her daughter’s father is her fourth husband. For months, he pursued *Saloma*, bewitched by her walk, through the suburbs, *falajs*[[4]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn4%22%20%5Co%20%22), and narrow slums, until she agreed to marry him. He left his town and wife to live with her.

The food is distributed and the forks, plates and knives are put on the table. The grilled meat, cakes and pastries are distributed around the tables but *Saloma*does not give them a glance. She stays motionless with a straight back, her relaxed look, fixed on the bride and the natural rose bouquet she is holding. Only when she is offered, *Saloma* starts to eat with the fork as if she has used it all her life. She chooses to drink Shani which leaves a crimson color on her lips. Whenever she moves her hand up or down, the bracelets tinkle and the *a’did*[[5]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn5%22%20%5Co%20%22), hidden under the sleeves of her *dishdasha,* leaks that musical sound which has a long history of captivating men’s minds.

We wink at each other and laugh, asking: “*Haih*O *Saloma*, what about your daughter’s father, why did he leave you too?” She straightens her back, puts both her hands around her waist, her eyes flickering, but before she says anything we cry: “jinx!” She smiles cheerfully and pats her thigh, affirming what we have just said, andremarks: “Yes,by Allah, it was a jinx. I found hair, bones and black threads buried in front of my house on a daily basis. Why are they jealous of me? No idea! I am a sick, lonely woman.” We say straight away: “No, no, there is nobody who is healthier than you. Although you are over sixty, your bewitching walk triggers a flirtatious cat-call from here and an admiring awww from there.” Her face becomes radiant as she, glad of our claims, reassures us that she still receives marriage proposals. But *Saloma* rejects them all because they are from aged men who are good for nothing except complaining.

*Saloma*wipes her mouth with a napkin. The women around her start to smarten up. Pocket mirrors are taken out of handbags, eyebrows re-brushed, lips repainted, faces are re-powdered, tresses of hear pushed back once again. *Saloma*, whose forehead has been smeared with saffron’s water, does not have a handbag. She has never needed one. She does not pay attention to handbag-women around her. Her eyes are fixed on the bride in front of the cameras.

The women moved to dancing in circles. Each circle grows dynamically bigger with the words of the songs, the songs that contain some Swahili words. *Saloma*does not understand Swahili, though one of her husbands spoke it very well. Their marriage did not last for more than a few months. When *Saloma* meets with women in the afternoon, she enjoys imitating her husband. She lies suddenly on her back, crosses her legs, and speaks loudly, feigning his hoarse voice: “No, by Allah! I never felt as comfortable with any other woman as with you, *Saloma*! You are bliss. You are a gift. Where were have you been all these years? *Aah*, take the *mandoos*, take the donkey, take the date palms, and stay with me. Where were you before, woman?” Then *Saloma* sits back and laughs: “As soon as I gave birth to my son, he left, taking with him the *mandoos*[[6]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn6%22%20%5Co%20%22), the donkey and palm trees. Jinx! Whenever he came home and I was not there, the evil-eyed women said: “She is with her lovers”-resounding lies! They are jealous of me. Why? I don’t know, I am just a lonely, sick woman.” She smiles, winking. We all do not hesitate to say: “You are in good health, and you are not alone. Your son is out of prison now, he will get married, and you will live to see his children.” Does the picture of her future grandchildren pass through her mind now, with the dazzling, dancing lights and loud music? Does she think about how they will look? Like her handsome son, who looks exactly like his father, or will they resemble their mother, who will probably be an Indian to cut down the wedding expenses? She could never afford such a wedding for her son, not even a traditional one. He will marry quietly and she will see his children. As for her other son, whom she not seen in years, he may have not be spared by Allah. He left in the same day his father left her, the seventh husband who married her in the year of drought.

The women come back from the dancefloor and collapse in their chairs. The bride fidgets restlessly and looks at the door. The songs and voices start to fade away. Some guests begin to leave. *Saloma* stays comfortably on her chair with her flawlessly content smile. Her partner whispers that the bus is leaving, only then does she stand swiftly as if she never suffered from back pain. She walks to the bridal throne, and places her hand on the head of the bride, who inclines it afraid of spoiling her expensively made hairstyle. *Saloma* mutters *Al-fatiha*[[7]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn7%22%20%5Co%20%22), and then walks-the same walk that made her a bride ten times- amidst the guests and leaves the wedding hall for the bus stop.

[[1]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref1%22%20%5Co%20%22) An Omani sweet made of sugar, nuts, and cardamom.

[[2]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref2%22%20%5Co%20%22) A traditional Omani hairstyle in which the hair is divided into two parts and perfumed with herbal plants like camphor, myrtle or flowers mixed with dates, musk and sesame oil.

[[3]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref3%22%20%5Co%20%22) An Omani traditional costume.

[[4]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref4%22%20%5Co%20%22) Omani water channel system.

[[5]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref5%22%20%5Co%20%22) An Omani traditional accessory that is worn in the upper arm.

[[6]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref6%22%20%5Co%20%22) A traditional Omani box in which clothes and other stuff are put, something like a cupboard but with traditional importance.

[[7]](http://jokha.com/short-stories/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref7%22%20%5Co%20%22) The first surra of the Qur’an.

Class 3 Discussion Questions

**Primary Learning Objectives**

-Learning about how literature can be used as a means to understanding Indian Ocean history

-Understanding the role of intercultural exchange as reflected by authors in their texts

-Examining how cultural perspectives and regional history can shape authors’ narratives

Ghosh and Alharthi Questions:

1. What influences of Indian Ocean trade are present in the works of Ghosh and Alharthi?
2. How do they perceive history and culture as a result?
3. Both authors have lived in various parts of the world and have traveled extensively. Does this type of cultural exchange affect their work differently? Why or why not?

General Questions:

1. What can literature teach us about the history of a region?
2. What have the readings taught specifically about the history of the Indian Ocean?
3. What are the differences in writing between eras? Do certain historical occurrences (e.g. the spread of Islam, the arrival of the Portuguese to the Indian Ocean, etc.) affect the perspectives of authors? If so, how?
4. What elements of cultural exchange from Indian Ocean interactions were evident from the readings?
5. What cultural perspectives did you learn about? Do you think different cultures approached similar historical events through different lenses? If so, how?
6. How does knowledge of Indian Ocean trade history shape our understanding of modern literature from countries along the Indian Ocean?