

The importance of multicultural literature

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The Importance of Multicultural Literature ENG/157 David McCarthy The

Importance of Multicultural Literature The introduction to multicultural literature into the broad world of differing walks of life, the reader may be surprised by the similarities between the cultures as well as the differences. Cultures are as eclectic as we are as individuals, each with their own quirks, intricacies, and uniqueness that inspires individuality regarding how the vast differences between cultures correlate to our own.

Upon deeper examination of multicultural literature, however; we are also given the privilege to walk the path of the individual from whose perspective we are privy to through the written word. As many have wished at one point or another to know and understand what a particular individual is thinking, through reading multicultural literature, the opportunity to have such an experience and glean copious amounts of information. From the subtlest detail to major political agendas to personality quirks derived from current or past social standards of that culture.

Although differences in points of view can prohibit understanding upon first contact greater exposure to literature from various cultures, one can find relation within themselves. One can empathize and humanize the characters that ultimately open the door to greater understanding of how a culture operates as well as attain the ability to relate those experiences to one's own. To understand multicultural literature, one must first try to understand the cultural background of the author where he or she lives, what time, what their secular views are in a particular subject as well as their passions and influences.

For instance, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o', author of the short story ' The Return' is heavily influenced by his negativity toward British colonialism in Africa. The " The Complete Review" (2010-2012) website had a list of the pros and cons of the author's writing stating that he has a " Powerful anti-colonial voice, a strong stylist, a significant novelist, playwright, and public intellectual. " It also went on to say that " Angry Marxist politics creep a bit far into some of his work and older works can feel somewhat dated. " Kamau, the main character in this particular work of Thiong'o's, depicts what the people ultimately have suffered because of the colonial regime within Africa. The character represents not only what the people of Africa forced to suffer but also hope that the effect of what transpired can be overcome through perseverance despite devastation endured. The author, Ken Saro-Wiwa, also politically motivated which is a characteristic prominent within his short story " Africa Kills Her Sun". Having sided with the minority Ogoni within his homeland of Nigeria, his protests and resistance against the dictatorship of General Sani Abacha led to his imminent execution.

Within this particular short story, though, he wrote the character Bana as one who sees his acts of criminality no different from that of those in more prestigious standing. This ultimately leads the reader to question how criminal activity, such as robbery is any different from that of the sly, underhanded actions of a politician or any other individual in a position of power. Readers also develop an emotional attachment to a character, such as the main character in Chitra Divakaruni's " Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter".

From the direct perspective of the character, the reader looks through the eyes of an elderly widow from India who struggles to find balance between

her ingrained traditions and customs from her native homeland to the vastly different culture of America. Mrs. Dutta struggles with her understanding of technology, culinary preferences, distinctively different parenting styles, and proper decorum regarding personal space. She finds herself lost within a struggle between wanting the companionship of her son and grandchildren and her yearning to return to the familiarity of home.

Upon closer examination of this piece, the reader can identify with the character and the feeling of misplacement in foreign surroundings. This story also illustrates the struggle with diversity within The United States. As Mrs. Dutta's son and his family try to maintain assimilation-disregarding their heritage and customs to avoid stereotyping, Mrs. Dutta reminds them of where they originate. The integration of cultures within The United States is predominantly why the United States viewed as the "Land of Opportunity". Despite the years of being classified as 'The Melting Pot', diversity remains a struggle for many immigrants.

This story is a prime example of the internal conflict between heritage and assimilation as well as the strength of familial bonds. The history of a culture is of huge importance within multicultural literature. The attack on 9/11 within the United States is an event that had both shattered the United States as well as assist in the formation of the future history of the United States. Pride and patriotism after that particular event blossomed along with a heavy rift regarding diversity, especially those of the Islamic faith.

Remembering such a tragic event honors those who have lived through it as well as lights a mental candle for those who did not. History is as important in other cultures as well. Understanding and appreciating facts as well as

religious mythology, such as the Native American mythology described within Margaret Lawrence's "The Loons". The loons within this story represent a mythological representation of an omen of death in some Native American cultures. The character, Piquette, after staggering through life with two separate identities-Cree and French-ultimately succumbs to this omen.

Much like the yellow ribbon represents the soldiers fighting to maintain our freedom battling terrorists and risking their lives, the loons in this story represent the battle between two different cultural backgrounds fighting against each other in a metaphorical sense. If a culture denies its history, the culture is denied its identity. History weaved within the yarns of multicultural literature shine a light upon the dusty background that assisted in the formation of the culture, therefore breaking down the barriers of the misunderstanding of ethics, principles, traditions, and mindset.

Much like the dissemination of the history and politics of different cultures, multicultural literature also deepens the understanding of perspective, education, and view on controversial topics such as in Ha Jin's "The Bridegroom". The "Barnes & Noble" (1997-2012) website included an editorial review upon the short story stating that "The title story is perhaps the most telling indication of the clash of humanitarian feeling and bureaucratic intervention.

The protagonist, who has been taught to believe that "homosexuality originated in Western capitalism and bourgeois lifestyle," is unable to credit his own sympathy for his son-in-law, who is sent to a mental hospital to cure his "disease." Ha Jin has a rare empathy for people striving to balance the past and the future although caught on the cusp of change. (Oct.) Copyright

2000 Cahners Business Information.]” (Editorial Reviews). The story, set in China illustrates the ignorance of homosexuality. Considering the different sects within the

United States and from other various countries and religious backgrounds that do not understand nor accept homosexuality, this story showcases how relative that misunderstanding can be. Although The United States has erred to the side of acceptance on this particular lifestyle, there are certain groups that due to the ignorance and neglect of education refuse to accept it. Aside from the topic of homosexuality within the piece and the misinformation regarding that particular lifestyle, the story also initiates the question of what marriage in point of fact entails.

With homosexuals fighting for the right to marry within the United States being the most controversial topic, the question that arises after reading “The Bridegroom”, is whether or not unwavering loyalty without sexual attraction predetermines a solid marriage. Beina, the main female character within the piece remains loyal to her homosexual husband despite his or her lack of physical intimacy instead based the relationship upon respect and companionship.

Reading multicultural literature not only strengthens the bond between individuals, it also strengthens the bonds of diversity. Diversity allows individuals to learn and expand knowledge. It increases the amount of respect through first person narratives, memoirs, and the ideals within fiction. Contrary to popular belief, fiction does instill fact in a comprehensive manner where the reader can walk for a short time in another individual's

footsteps, trace out the character's heritage, and take a glimpse inside the mind of an individual from a foreign land.

A writer puts themselves into their work and the readers having taken the time to examine the stories can see the particular voice of the writer to understand and appreciate the author as well as the characters. References

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