

Crick crack, monkey essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In what ways and to what effects are colonial pasts remembered and thus rewritten in any one or more of the texts of this unit? Throughout Merle Hodge's postcolonial novel 'Crick Crack, Monkey' we are led through the childhood of the main protagonist, Tee. A main and paramount theme that runs throughout this narrative is that of education. It is due to this theme that Tee's colonial past is changed and distorted. At the outset of the narrative that we are introduced to a young girl living a simple, but happy life in Trinidad with her Aunt Tantie.

This urban life becomes misshapen when Tee attends secondary school and is sent to live with her Aunt Beatrice. It is through Aunt Beatrice's European ideal and Tee's European socialisation at secondary school that her colonial past is transformed and rewritten. From the outset of the novel we see Tee as a young confused girl. Her mother died in childbirth, which caused her father to emigrate overseas, "Then papa went to sea. I concluded that what he had gone to see was whether he could find Mammy and the baby". This confusion subsides momentarily although does not disappear as the novel progresses.

We observe Tee in her new life with her Aunt Tantie. It is here that Tee experiences the traditional part of her culture in an urban, lower class home. Although her life is not full of riches and expensive education she learns many other life skills that make her streetwise and that will be an integral part of her personality for years to come. It is here that Tee learns urban skills, to be independent like her aunt Tantie and to stand up for herself. The protagonist talks of her time with Aunt Tantie with fondness and respect, this can be seen within the novel, "Tantie's company was loud and hilarious.

“ The children scurried about giddily, sometimes we were coaxed inside to dance, sometimes to our delight the company spread over a whole weekend”. Tee is allowed to be herself and this is shown through her expression in dance. The life she leads with Tantie is not regimental in any sense, Tee is allowed to grow and develop in this urban environment. However it becomes clear that Tantie wants better for Tee than the life that she herself lives. We learn that Tantie is uneducated, this is revealed in her colloquial language, “... yu t’ink blasted saga-clothes an’ t’eater does grow on tree? .

We ascertain that Tantie wants Tee to be educated to give her an expanded worldview further than the realms of Trinidad. It is at this point that Tee is sent away to live with her other relative, Aunt Beatrice. Tantie imparts her advice upon Tee before she leaves, reminding her that she is going to school “ to learn book” and warns her against allowing her teachers to decant nonsense into her mind. It is through the colonial education that Tee receives, that her colonial past, and her urban, simple life with Aunt Tantie is changed and rewritten forever.

This begins with the next stage of her life with aunt Beatrice. Beatrice is part of the middle class of society. This can be seen in the way she embraces European ideals and turns away from her roots and her culture. The European colonizer is much to blame for Aunt Beatrice’s change of opinion. Life in this new middle class household was at first hard for Tee. This is apparent in the novel when she first arrived into the foreign situation. Tee looks at her suitcase full of her possessions and realises, at this young age, that they will not fit into this new euro centric world.

This divide between the afrocentric, provided by Tantie, and the euro centric provided by Beatrice is the central premise of this text and is therefore the reason that Tee's culture is torn from her clutches. In this new household Beatrice offers Tee the maternal line but shows not maternal instinct. Beatrice teaches tee many things, such as being polite but only to be pretentious and to enforce her new European stance, " Say ' Good afternoon Father, good afternoon ladies' ". Beatrice throughout the novel strives to remove all trace of the urban life Tee lived previously.

This begins with he starting at a new European school with her cousins. Tee's cousins are cruel to her as they consider her to be of a lower class to themselves. This is apparent in the novel when they refuse to let Tee walk with them to school; " Carol and Jessica ' took' me to school, all the way walking miles away from me and from each other. They abandoned me entirely before we entered to gate". Another major contrast with her old life is depicted when aunt Beatrice takes her to dance classes with her cousins.

Instead of dance being about self-expression, tee is forced into repression, " ' remember to speak nicely dear' whispered Auntie Beatrice. ", " Auntie Beatrice more of less pushed me into the whirlpool of bodies wherein I collided with a ballet dancer". Tee experiences further alienation from her cultural background when Beatrice changes her name to the more euro centric appropriate, " Cynthia". Life in the new household was not always as it seemed. Beatrice tried hard to portray the united happy, colonised, middle class family. However we see many cracks in this ideal.

Life with Tantie was happy, with Beatrice we see many forms of disobedience and disrespect from Carol and Jessica in the direction of their mother, " I'm sure I would have never spoken to my mother like that". We see the European ideal further outlined in Beatrice's home when we are told of a picture of a white ancestor which received pride of place in the household, " The large oval photograph, reddish-brown with age and encircled in a heavy frame of gilded foliage... was that of the white ancestress, Elizabeth Helen Carter". Throughout Hodge's novel we see Tee develop into a colonised individual.

This is where his colonial background is rewritten. There are many forces at work within the narrative, which slowly but surely change Tee's natural character. This became possible through her western style education and by the desire of Aunt Beatrice. Tee's past becomes distorted through Aunt Beatrice's desire for her children to be accepted into middle class society. It is easy to change to perception of young children whilst they learn new things about the world they live in, and this is what happens to Tee. The aspiring class often show distaste towards the lower classes of society through condescension.

We view this when Beatrice visits Tee's at Tantie's house, " Don't touch anything children". This class distinction is apparent throughout the narrative, we see Tantie repeatedly refer to Beatrice as " the bitch". In her new society Beatrice expected Tee to receive the same education that was provided for the relatives of the colonizer. She was subjected to many European lessons. This resulted in Tee acquiring European culture. Tee was

taught many concepts that she had no prior knowledge of as they were not relevant and were not an everyday occurrence in her own life.

Her first few months at school were hard as she found it difficult to make the adjustment. The concept of the 'apple' was strange to her, "Began A for apple, the exotic fruit that made its brief and stingy appearance at Christmastime". This unfamiliarity is also depicted when Tee was introduced to European rhyme little boy blue, "what, in all creation, was a 'haystack' ". Tee was often confused by these new concepts, when she did not understand she was beaten by her schoolmaster. Essentially the new colonised regime is beaten into the children. Tee quickly became accustomed to her Aunts imported Bourgeois life.

This again enforces the point that it the education provided both by the school and by Beatrice at home that modifies Tee's outlook and opinions on her culture. There is a clear distinction between the two sides of tee's family, most prominently in the economic sense. The effects of this repressive, western, colonial education are great on Tee's character. We see that she becomes confused and is often unsure about her identity. Her identity is not clear-cut, as her child experiences are fraught with conflict. When tee goes to the colonized school we slowly see her worldview change.

This change is thought makes her detached from Aunt Tantie and she finds it harder and harder to relate to her, "At times I resented Tantie bitterly for not having let Auntie Beatrice get us in the first place and bring us up properly. What Auntie Beatrice said so often was quite true : how could a woman with no sense of right and wrong take it upon herself to bring up

children". We see Tee develop this mixed identity, she feels alienated from her cultural background but does not wish to completely disown it, " And I was ashamed and distressed to find myself thinking of Tantie in this way".

Through this we start to see Tee devalue and disown her history by shutting out her lower class family, " Carnival came, and I discovered that I did not even want to go home for carnival... saw the unmistakable niggeryness of the affair". Tee's aunt Beatrice preaches about white supremacy and looks highly on anglicised members of society. Tee hears these ideals in everyday life and obviously begins to believe many of them. It is due to these situations that Tee reluctantly denies Tantie. It becomes apparent that she is embarrassed by her.

By rejecting Tantie Tee actively rejects her traditional culture, through this she actively denigrates her previous existence. She notices the physical and economic separation of her family. Tee has no other choice than to grow to hate the society into which she was born. Due to Tee's colonial education we see her develop a love of reading and books. As her own life is disjointed she sees the western scenes that she reads as closer to reality than her own life, " Chimneys and apple trees". It is due to this love of books and her wild imagination that Tee creates a double identity for herself.

She is so confused about her own boundaries and identity that this becomes her way of escape. She gives this second identity, the name of the white ancestress that Aunt Beatrice hails in her living room, " Helen". Tee could have created this double consciousness in order that she may occupy both social spheres at once without fear of alienating the other. The education of

children is the key to colonisation. Even though Tee has been through the cycle of attending a euro centric school she never reaches her personal ideal.

Tee tries hard to be the perfect model of the colonized girl, but she never quite manages to reach her distant goal. It seems that due to her early years of life she is never quite anglicised enough to succeed in her ultimate wish. It is through this personal failure that she decides to give up the fantasy world of Helen that she herself created. It is only a promised trip to stay with her father in England that ensures her ultimate acceptance into middle class society “... letter from Tantie saying my father was sending two plane tickets... what a lucky girl you are! ‘ she cooed, ‘ but tell me, how long has your daddy been up there? ‘ “.

Her call to England brings about a desire to escape. Tee is still unsure about her identity until the end of the novel. She doesn't know where her home is, “ Several times in the next few weeks I contemplated running away back to Tantie”. For the main protagonist of this narrative her colonial past is remembered with somewhat embarrassment and disgust. Her colonial past is rewritten through colonial education and the euro centric attitude of her Aunt Beatrice.

The ultimate effect of this is Tee being torn between the Aunt Tantie's urban Creole existence and her aunt Beatrice's imported bourgeois life. Throughout Tee struggles with her double consciousness. As Tee is alone in Trinidad both these women have immense influence over her. The conflict between these two parties can never be resolved fully therefore Tee is never able to resolve

the problem and choose one form of life in place of the other. This conflict arises from Tantie's and Beatrice's distaste for the respective other class.

Tantie often refers to Beatrice as 'The bitch' whereas Beatrice instils middle class ideals in Tee, that blacks are worse people than white people. Tee cannot find anything positive to link herself to therefore is unsure about her identity until the end of the narrative. We see that she is psychologically torn regarding her social relevance. Tee is not much more than a child when the book ends and her problems are left unresolved. For Tee England promises a new start and an opportunity to think about her identity away from the conflict of home.

The novel has an ambiguous ending and we never receive a resolution to Tee's problems, "I desired with all my heart that it were the next morning and a plane were lifting me off the ground". This is the unfortunate outcome a colonial education has on the colonised members of society. The education given had the intention of 'civilising' and bettering the prospects of its participants. By rewriting the culture and background the question is raised if this 'help' given by the Europeans did more harm than good to children like Tee.