

Assignment on poetry from other cultures and traditions

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



Ever since life on Earth started it has been closely linked with suffering. Sometimes, against their will people hurt each other. All people have values of their own, dignity or pride, money or power, beauty and attractiveness. Depending on the individual depressing these values may lead to very strong feelings. Throughout history some of the best pieces of art have been influenced by the creators thoughts. Suffering is one of those feelings. In this assignment I will try and look inside the suffering that has led to the writing of these poems...

Many women that left their homeland, in the 1860-80s, saw ' new life' in the face of New Zealand. They were taken up there by ships, and the only information about them was from the records. Those women left behind their past, to start a new full of expectations future. In those records there is a girl, Charlotte O'Neil, who is listed as a ' general servant'. Fiona Farrel chooses her as a leading character, to sing a song about her feelings and thoughts, in her play Passengers. Her song is only set in two tenses – the past and the future.

Like the song reveals, the job involved everything, from opening the front door, to emptying the chamber pot. In the first verse the girl tells us all the work she had to do for her master. The last line:

'...and I scrubbed till my hands were raw'

is probably most impressive. The girl is only seventeen years old and the usage of the word ' raw' strongly describes her suffering. As a whole this verse only focuses on what physical work she was expected to do.

The next verse goes on to show the distinct contrast between the lives of the rich and the poor. She initiates an argument about the fairness of the social system that in 1800s is considered out of question. It is a commonly accepted issue that the poor stay poor and the rich stay rich. The girl compares the 'attic cot' she has to sleep on and the 'silken pillow' that her master deserves only for his wealth. She also has the humiliating job of emptying the chamber pot, which would crush anyone's dignity, even more at the naive age of seventeen. There is a reference to the hymn 'All Things Bright and Beautiful',

'The rich man earns his castle, you said.

The poor deserves the gate.'

Which even argues that the social hierarchy is God's will. Charlotte believes she does not deserve 'the poor girl's lot'. The whole verse reflects her belief in equality. Those words distinctively show her passionate wish for independence, for the simple freedom to eat and sleep whenever she wants.

With these words she wants to finish the past and move on into the future.

The next versus is based on her hopes and expectations from it. It is stressing just how different it is going to be from the past. It starts off with rebellious statements

'But I'll never say 'sir'

or 'thank you ma'am'

and I'll never curtsy more.'

These duties have obviously been very unpleasant for her, to have to speak to everyone as inferior.

Last verse of the Charlotte O'Neil's Song shows her incredible determination to change things. It hints on her decision to leave and become independent.

There is one sarcastic phrase that she uses, ' my dear', probably with some sense of superiority. Charlotte is leaving her master to cope with all the duties on his own and she refers to this as revenge. Final lines are:

' And I'll eat when I please

and I'll sleep where I please

and you can open your own front door.'

Throughout the song she repeats this twice. It obviously means a lot to her that she will at last be responsible for her own actions and she will not be dictated or restricted in any way. The whole last verse seems to be sung with rage and pure happiness. Since now she is on board of the ship to New Zealand, she believes all her suffering is over.

Jejuri, India. Poverty is a well-known companion to the people in India.

Unemployed, elderly people cannot live on a pension. Seeing starving children around and realising that the last days of their lives are going to be spent begging is suffering. ' An Old Women' by Arun Kolatkar is reflects this suffering.

Arun Kolatkar puts us in place of the tourist in Jejuri. This makes the situation seem more real and lets the reader experience it more personally. In the second stanza he introduces an old beggar woman that just want some change. In return she offers the tourist to take him to the horseshoe shrine. In the next stanza she already becomes too persistent. A normal reaction would be annoyance and anger

‘ You know how old women are.

They stick to you like a burr.’

A normal reaction would be annoyance and anger. The comparison with a sticky plant is well founded. The tourist is trying to escape from this embarrassing situation

‘... with an air of finality.

You want to end the farce.’

He would have probably been rude to her, while trying to get rid off her. This is the turning point of the poem. Till this stanza the tourist has had negative attitude towards the poor woman, but she makes him realise how wrong he is.

‘ What can an old woman do

on hills as wretched as these?’

The tourist is obviously a Western European, coming from a developed country, where poverty never gets to these extreme conditions when starvation causes a woman's eyes to look like 'bullet holes', her skin is 'cracking' ... Through these metaphors Arun Kolatkar shows the whole misery of this woman. On the background of her suffering, the fifty paise coin seems absolutely needless to the tourist. The last stanza makes the strongest impact from the whole poem on the reader.

' And you are reduced

to so much small change

in her hand.'

The personification with each of us seems so near and so real. And stays in our minds and next time we see someone begging on the street we remember, the Old Woman.

For every human being childhood is an important period, when every little thing excites and stays in the memory forever. Coming back to the home place after many years brings back all these incredible memories. Now from a more mature perspective everything starts to become clearer. ' Nothing's Changed' is an autobiographical poem of Tatamkhulu Afrika. It is not only based on racism, but also on the idea how strongly one feels about his childhood place.

It starts with a description of the familiar District Six.

‘ Small round hard stones click

under my heels,

seeding grasses thrust’

Long time ago he had lived there as a ‘ coloured’, because he was Muslim. As the government in South Africa changed, this area turned into strictly ‘ whites only’.

‘ ...

incipient Port Jackson trees:

new, up-market, haute cuisine,

guard at the gatepost,

whites only inn.’

These words show how much has the estate changed since it has become only for white people.

‘ No sign says it is:

but we know where we belong.’

These words are very important. This is where he tells us about his suffering. Although there is no sign confirming that the inn is ‘ whites only’, he knows he wouldn’t be allowed in there. On basis of his classification, ‘ coloured’, he has to go and eat in the cheap *café*½.

Down the road,

working's man cafi½ sells

bunny chows.' '

All the memories from the past come back to him, when he was a boy and wanted to smash the glass of a ' whites only' inn.

' Hands burn

for a stone, a bomb,

to shiver down the glass.'

Although when he returns to his home place, there is already a new government that has promised to change this division between the population, he realises that ' Nothing's Changed'. It will take many years before the antagonism between the different races is overcome and this painful to accept.

These poems bring up some important issues, about equality, poverty and racism. In the way they are written they keep the reader interested and involved all the time. All three poems present different situations, in different places and with different backgrounds. The only thing that brings them so closely together is the strong feeling that inspired them. This common feeling is suffering.