

Civilization Sequence 204
Hand out for Tayeb Salih's
Season of Migration to the North

Military Campaigns/Sexual Conquest & Tragedy

January 20, 2009

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I. Introduction

- Tayeb Salih (born 1929, as-Shamaliyah province, Sudan). Salih attended universities in the Sudan and in London. Worked for the BBC Arabic Service. *Season of Migration to the North* (1966, English translation 1969 by Denys Johnson-Davies) reflects the conflicts of modern Africa.
- The conflicting world in the novel: tradition versus education, rural versus urban and men versus women.

II. Tayeb Salih's Speech at AUB in 1980:

"... I believe that if I have contributed anything to modern Arabic literature, it is my constant plea for toleration.."

"....I created a conflicting world in which nothing is certain, and formalistically, two voices to force the reader to make up his/her mind."

- The two voices in the novel: The narrator
Mustafa Sa'eed

III. The colonial context: South-North encounter/clash?

The Battle of Omdurman 1898: Muhammad Ahmad regarded by his followers as the *mahdi*, created a state based on the teachings of Islam, the state was ended by the Anglo-Egyptian occupation of the Sudan in 1898. The English army was led by General Herbert Kitchener.

IV. Postcolonial Arab discourse: traditionalism versus modernism.

Impact of the West during the Nahda (literally means awakening). It covers the period from the mid or late nineteenth century to the present.

The debate centered round modernity: Is modernity uniquely a European Phenomenon?

What does it mean to be modern? Does it mean becoming Western, different, the Other?

V. The Narrator: the *Other*.

- The crisis of geographic and internal migration.
- A storm-swept feather: the Other in England (The North).
- A storm-swept feather: the Other in the Sudan (The South).
- Two reasons for the narrator's alienation:
 - 1 Patriarchy, Hosna and tragedy.
 2. The corruption of the new rulers of Africa : neocolonialism

IV. Mustafa Sa'eed: Intellect and Lust

- Resumes the battle of Omdurman during his stay in England (The North).
His victims:
Sheila Greenwood: a waitress in a Soho restaurant
Isabella Seymour: wife of a successful surgeon and mother of two daughters and a son.
Ann Hammond: young university student
- The *divided* self of Mustafa Sa'eed:
 1. Freudian: Divided between Eros and Thanatos.
 2. South/North dichotomy: Love/hatred relationship.
"I am South that yearns for the North and the ice."p. 30.
 3. Both conqueror and conquered, modern and traditional.

-The *contradictory selves* of Mustafa Sa'eed:

Lives and becomes a lie, he is Charles, Hassan, invader, intruder, colonizer, conqueror, Othello and no Othello: "He (Othello) loved not wisely, but too well." (Shakespeare),V,ii.

- A pessimistic or an optimistic end?

The narrator trapped between South and North.

"Turning to left and right, I found I was half-way between north and south. I was unable to continue, unable to return."p.167

Quotes from Season of Migration to the North

The Narrator:

1. "I felt not like a storm swept feather, but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose."(p. 2)
2. "By the standards of the European industrial world we are poor peasants, but when I embrace my grandfather I experience a sense of richness as though I am a note in the heartbeats of the very universe." (p.73)
3. "I too had lived with them. But I had lived with them superficially, neither loving nor hating them." (p. 49)
4. "Over there is like here, neither better nor worse. But I am from here, just as the date palm standing in the courtyard of our houseThe fact that they came to our land, I know not why, does that mean that we should poison our present and our future?" (p. 49)
5. "Mustafa Sa'eed said to them I have come to you (the British) as a conqueror... But their own coming was not a tragedy as we imagine nor yet a blessing as they imagine." (p. 60)
6. "In this village the men are guardians of the women." (p. 98)
7. "That in one form or another, I was in love with Hosna Bint Mahoud, the widow of Mustafa Sa'eed." (p. 104)
8. "God curse all women! Women are the sisters of the Devil." (p.123)
9. "There is no justice or moderation in the world." (p. 102)
10. "There is no justice or moderation in the world. I feel bitterness and hatred, for after all those victims he crowned his life with yet another one, Hosna Bint Mahmoud, the only woman I have ever loved .She killed poor Wad Rayess and killed herself because of Mustafa Sa'eed." (pp.141-142)
11. "There is no room for me here. Why don't I pack up and go? Nothing astonishes these people. They take everything in their stride. They neither rejoice at a birth nor are saddened at a death....And I, what have I learnt?" (p. 130)
12. "All my life I had not chosen, had not decided. Now I am making a decision. I choose life. It is not my concern whether or not life has meaning. If I am unable to forgive, then I shall try to forget."(pp.168-9)

B. Mustafa Sa'eed:

1. ".....and I, over and above everything else, am a colonizer, I am the intruder whose fate must be decided. When Mahmoud Wad Ahmad was brought in shackles to Kitchener after his defeat at the Battle of Atbara, Kitchener said to him, why have you come to lay waste and plunder?" It was the intruder who said this to the person whose land it was, and the owner of the land bowed his head and said nothing." (p. 94)
2. "By day I lived with the theories of Keynes and Tawney and at night I resumed the war with bow and sword and spear and arrows." (p. 34)
3. "And the train carried me to Victoria station and to the world of Jean Morris." (pp. 29, 31, 33)
4. "The distant call still rings in my ears. I thought that my life and marriage here would silence it...Rationally I know what is right...But mysterious things in my soul and in my blood impel me towards faraway parts that loom up before me and cannot be ignored" (p. 66)
5. "But there was nothing I could do. Having been a hunter, I had become the quarry. I was in torment; and in a way I could not understand, I derived pleasure from my suffering." (p. 159)
6. "Opening a notebook, I read on the first page: (My Life Story – on the next page was the dedication: To those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue and see things as either black or white, either Eastern or Western." (p. 151)
7. "The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops; the schools were started so as to teach us how to say "Yes" in their language." (p. 95)
8. "I am like Othello, Arab-African." (p. 38)
9. "I am no Othello, I am a lie. Why don't you sentence me to be hanged and so kill the lie?" (p.33)