**Ends and Beginnings:**

**Late 19th & Early 20th Century Literature & Culture**

Joseph J Walters: *Guanya Pau, a Story of an African Princess*

**Points to Consider**

1. How does Walters portray the African marriage system?
2. Why is his protagonist ‘an African princess’ rather than an average woman?
3. How does this novel relate to other feminist works on the syllabus?
4. How is the African landscape described?
5. How does Walters characterise Guanya? Is it problematic that his understanding of beauty is predicated on Caucasian aesthetics?
6. What is the significance of religion to the text?
7. Consider the paratextual elements, like the preface and the frontispiece of Queen Ranavalona. How do they effect the reader’s interpretation of the text?
8. Is Walters wholly critical of African culture or is there a place for it in his novel?
9. How does he create a complex understanding of western influences?
10. How are the social bonds between women explored?
11. Walters presents two competing paradigms for masculinity; what are these?
12. Consider the portrayal of “medicine”.
13. Consider the commercialisation of relationships.
14. How does Walters’ portrayal of Africa differ from other portrayals of the same time period?

Masculinity, Nationhood and Degeneration

In this respect their dignitaries of yore differ from those of today; and I may say that this is the supreme cause of their decline. They did not look upon work as something beneath the dignity of a gentleman. One would often see the chief with hoe in hand working side by side with his servant. The Vey gentleman of today, on the other hand, has many *jonkais* (servants) and *musus* (wives) who do the work, while he lounges around chatting and smoking, flirting with the pretty Borneys. (4)

[The Veys] were men of superior fibre. In strength, herculean; in statesmanship, brilliant; in principle, uncompromising. With them liberty was man’s supreme and divine right, and he had no reason to live except in the full, untrammelled exercise of it. No threat could baffle them, no sudden appearance of the enemy on the frontier could intimidate them, no amount of money could bride them. But on reason for the present degeneration of the Veys is due to their alliance with the Liberians who fight their battles for them. (3)

Her own father, Manja Kai Popo, excelled his father and grandfather by having in addition to his martial prowess, the ability of a statesman. Had this man been born under the benign heaven of Europe or America, his name would stand in history beside the immortal Napoleon and Washington. (3)

Physiognomy and Aesthetics of Beauty

The same independent bearing, the queenly carriage, the scornful air, the careless attitude, the cleanly-cut, well-made feature, large expressive eyes, the reckless abandon which characterises the toss of her pretty little head, dimpled cheeks, pearly teeth, mouth and lips a decided improvement on the typical African’s, lithe, elastic, a little graceful, straight-forward, a matter-of-fact kind of girl, somewhat headstrong, with the air of one who was born to rule and not be ruled. (8)

\*It is nothing strange that in Africa, and that too in the parts called “negro land”, we find women with features as fair and as delicate as the Caucasian; small hands and feet, oval cheeks, teeth of marvellous whiteness, and many exceedingly beautiful. (8)

Subjugation of Women

“Farther in the woods, the next day, I ran across a limping chimpanzee, and watched him go to a certain shrubbery and apply its tender leaves to his wounds. I shot him in the interests of the medical science, and found he had been snake bitten. I marked the shrubbery, had one of my good-for-nothing female servants bitten by a snake, applied the leaves, and found a wonderful liniment for snake-bite.”

Whereupon the Council unanimously voted that Dr. Papa-Guy-a-Gey should be considered in all lands a nobleman and a benefactor of mankind, and to further attest to their appreciation and gratitude, by giving him for a paramour the prettiest woman in the village. (44)

“Now, you know, woman is nowhere among us recognised as man’s equal, hence no redress can be demanded for her treatment. Furthermore, is she not in the same class with the mule or cow? You would all answer yes. Well, if I should kill my cow, none of you could raise the least objection… it is my loss, I paid seventy-five dollars in cloth and ivory for her and if I choose to throw away my money it is nobody’s business but my own.

African landscape and African people

The Africans have not yet awakened to the full consciousness of their worth. It needs only the application of scientific and industrial principles to the illimitable resources of that wonderful land which are lying dormant, to make her rival the most affluent of her sister continents. Vegetation luxuriant. Climate miraculous. Already, with the veil but lifted, she is captivating the eye and intoxicating the brain of the daring lovers of mammon; and the cry today is ringing throughout the length and breadth of civilisation: “Go to, let us have a share in the land.” What stores of oil, kernel, ivory, indigo, India rubber, gutta percha, copal, skins, teak; wood enough to furnish the cabinet works of all nations; fruits sufficient to make pies and puddings for one-half the population of the world; cereals, water abounding with all kinds of fish etc.,etc. May God soon open the door of this great country, and preserve the whole land from Cape Bon on the north to the Cape of Good Hope on the south; from Cape Guardafui on the east to Cape Verd on the west, for the black man, the African, whose exclusive, divine heritage it is. (48)

Like other Vey towns, Tosau had its innumerable Gregees and “medicines”, and manifold other indications told that they too were bound hands and foot by the chains of hoary superstitions. (107)

The Gregree Bush is an institution in some respects similar to the “white cross society” in America. The Girls’ Gregree Bush is of time immorial. Said to be as old as the Vey tribe itself and founded by the old wizard, Pandama-Pluzhaway, the Devil’s brother-in-law. (13)

…the evangelicalisation of Africa must be done by human agencies. Another fact is worthy of note here, and that is civilisation is never indigenous, but *conditioned on the contact of races.* (22)

She told her comrades with all the emphasis of her positive nature, that *sooner than marry him she would drown herself in the lake.* (9)