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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Literature and Race

Course Code: ENG5EJ303(2) • Module 3 Notes

Unit 11: They Come in All Colours – Malcolm Hansen

Malcolm Hansen and the Poetics of Racial Liminality

Malcolm Hansen's critically acclaimed debut novel *They Come in All Colours* (2017) is an extraordinary, lyrical exploration of race, passing, and biracial identity in 1970s America. The novel centers on Benjamin Holmes, a precocious teenage boy born to an African American father and a white Jewish mother. Hansen structures the narrative around a profound geographic and psychological dichotomy: the overt, violent Jim Crow apartheid of rural Georgia where Ben spent his childhood, and the deceptive, covert, polite racism of an elite, all-white private boarding school (Phillips Exeter Academy) in New Hampshire where he is sent on a scholarship.

The Agony of the Color Line and Racial Passing

Endowed with light skin and keen intellectual brilliance, Ben finds himself occupying a precarious racial borderland. In the South, the "one-drop rule" legally and socially condemns him as black, exposing him to white terrorist vigilantes and the trauma of racial violence. In the elite New England academy, however, Ben discovers that his ambiguous racial appearance allows him to pass as white or exotic European. Hansen brilliantly dissects the severe psychological toll of racial passing: to pass is to gain temporary safety and class privilege at the devastating cost of betraying one's ancestral heritage, living under constant terror of exposure, and severing ties with the black community that nurtured him.

Institutional Elitism and Structural Complicity

Hansen exposes the hypocrisy of Northern white liberalism. While the elite boarding school professes enlightened meritocracy and racial tolerance, its marble halls and secret societies reproduce systemic white ruling-class power. Ben is expected to perform as a grateful token, sanitizing his rage and assimilating into white patrician mores. Through Ben's turbulent interior journey, Hansen illustrates that racial categories in America are not benign color descriptions, but rigid caste boundaries that violently punish those who dare to cross them.

Unit 12: One Christmas Eve – Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance

Langston Hughes (1901–1967), the preeminent poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance, was a master of the American short story. Hughes dedicated his creative life to illuminating the lived reality of the black working class, capturing their speech idioms, blues sensibilities, and courageous humor in the face of unrelenting racial apartheid. His classic short story "One Christmas Eve" (from the 1934 collection *The Ways of White Folks*) provides a searing, heartbreaking critique of racial segregation in small-town Midwestern America.

The Irony of Christian Charity in a Segregated Society

The story unfolds on Christmas Eve, a holiday ostensibly dedicated to universal love, Christian goodwill, and peace on earth. The protagonist is Arnie, a hardworking African American domestic maid who toils relentlessly in the kitchen of the wealthy white Mrs. Rathbone. Mrs. Rathbone, preoccupied with her lavish holiday dinner party, exhibits complete indifference toward Arnie's personal life, forcing her to work overtime and delaying her return to her young son, Joe, who waits eagerly at home for his mother's promised Christmas toys.

The Shattering of Childhood Wonder: Joe and the White Santa Claus

The emotional climax of the story occurs when young Joe, clutching a nickel his mother gave him, wanders through the freezing snow into the dazzling, festively decorated town square. Drawn by the twinkling lights and cheerful music, Joe enters the local movie theatre lobby, where a white department store Santa Claus is laughing and distributing gifts. Joe, possessing the pure innocence of childhood, approaches Santa Claus with wide, expectant eyes, believing the mythical figure represents universal kindness. However, the white Santa Claus violently pushes the child away, snarling racial slurs: "Get out of here! This isn't for niggers!" The sudden, brutal intrusion of adult racial hatred shatters Joe's innocent world. Hughes exposes the grotesque hypocrisy of a white Christian civilization that celebrates the birth of a savior while practicing daily cruelty against black children.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 1)

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2. Global Circuits of Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Dispossession, and Anti-Blackness

Connecting the poetic, fictional, and cinematic texts across this course reveals the interconnected global architecture of modern racial capitalism, as theorized by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism*. From the brutal slave plantations of the Americas and the diamond mines of Southern Africa to the violent dispossessions of Australian Aborigines and Canadian First Nations, the global capitalist economy was historically built upon racialized dispossession, forced labor, and racial genocide.

Achille Mbembe's concept of *necropolitics*—the sovereign capacity to dictate who matters and who is disposable, who may live and who must die—finds tragic realization in contemporary police killings of black bodies like Oscar Grant, the environmental degradation of indigenous tribal territories, and the carceral state's hyper-incarceration of racial minorities. By examining how diverse racialized communities—Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Hispanic—articulate their lived realities, literature emerges as a primary site of internationalist solidarity, forging coalitions of resistance against global imperial hegemony.

3. Aesthetic De-Alienation and the Reclamation of Radical Futurity

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 3)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 4)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 5)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 6)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 7)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 8)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 3 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 9)

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