

Teacher – Manjula Sholapurkar

Lecture --- 2 'Wild Lemons' by David Malouf

Note for Students -- This lecture like the one on 'Revolving Days' requires your familiarity with the text and also the audio clip. The poem in a typical Maloufian manner has a graceful lightness of tone. As personal memory is vital to 'Revolving Days', 'Wild Lemons' grows out of a collective consciousness, you can also say collective memory. Therefore there is a greater connotative embeddedness of in this poem. This lecture has several questions directed at you, many are rhetorical in nature. They are meant to be aids to your understanding.

* The poem was first published in 1980 in a volume by the same name and later again in the volume *Poems 1959-1989*.

* The motif of the journey is central to the poem, the 'we' in the third line is the articulation of collective memory. It is the voice of migrants to Australia, and the temporal specificities of these multiple journeys are fused in this poem, because it is an imaginatively telescoped history of the settler colonies, coming together to form a nation.

* In this sense, the poem is constitutive of the 'national imaginary' (Brigid Rooney, quoted by Amrita Singh; see *World View*). The dedication to Don Dunstan, The 35th charismatic premier of South Australia, 'locates the poem within the context of nation building and pioneering change despite hardship'. (editor's note in the *World View* edition).

* Reading the poem, how would you characterize these migrations? Exile, displacements, (do not gloss over the difficult conditions under which the early settlers came and the hardships they faced; acquaint yourself with the history of Australian settlement) or an eventual home coming?

* What are the images through which the poem develops? What do the wild lemons symbolize?

* What is the treatment of time in the poem, is the recurrence of the phrase, 'present is open to - -' associated with hope? Does the present incorporate the past? How do images of Day and Night contribute to the meaning of the poem beyond the diurnal cycle?

* How is nature represented in the poem? Locate lines and images that convey the sense of the mysterious in nature. Does it tell you something about the relationship between man and nature in the context of Australia, as distinct from the old world; European attitude of conquest and domination of natural spaces?

* Is nature the 'other' in this poem, is the topography of the island continent amenable to human comprehension or does it remain a challenge? How is the terrestrial body visualised in the poem?

* Is the Maloufian notion of the 'edge', incorporated in the metaphor of the journey in this poem? How does the 'edge' become a liminal space of possibility in the poem?

* In terms of space , how does the human body respond to the landscape? The primacy of the 'human body' in its desiring subjectivity, is foregrounded in Malouf's poetry. In the previous lecture, I had commented on the erotic in relation to the 'beloved' as the 'other'. Can we transpose the erotic in relation to the landscape as the 'other'? According to Don Randall, 'Malouf strives, seemingly whenever possible, to encounter his world as a complete sensuous body.' ----- 'The senses that actually contact and interact with the substances of the world are brought into play; things touched, tasted, or smelled often contribute indissociably to the composition of place.' (Don Randall, *The Poetry of Malouf*, 2007; *World View*) The idea is developed into 'metamorphosis of the body' - - - and leads by extension, to an 'erotics of place'(Dale and Gilbert quoted in Randall).

* ' Metamorphosis is a recurrent theme in Malouf's writing, where new possibility can be hedged in the mundane. As the closing lines of 'Wild Lemons' suggest'(Amrita Singh, *World view*,381).

* David Malouf's words on the Influence of the Landscape in shaping the psyche of the people and their history, '--- nature as it embodies itself, in a particular place, as land, landscape, weather, space, light, and which not only forms a background to the dramas and occasions we call history but also significantly shapes them, and shapes as well the psyche of those who live with the opportunities and limitations they present' (The 2000 Neustadt Lecture, *World View* 328).

* 'Transcendence', is another constitutive idea in Malouf's work. Like the notion of 'metamorphosis' which is a cognitive process of interiorising the landscape through experience, thought and sensory perception (to paraphrase further, metamorphosis is expressed in the poem as the merger of the human body in the body of the landscape). The journey- - 'that starting out among blazed trunks' and - - - ' I lie down/ in different weather though the same body', at both the individual level , as well as that of the subsuming collective consciousness , is a transformative experience. This transformation leads to 'transcendence', of experiential and imaginative limitations.(Read Natalie Seger, *Imagining Transcendence: The Poetry of David Malouf* ; A chapter is included in *World View*. Also, refer to Amrita Singh's essay for the development of this idea; She has very aptly commented on the lines towards the conclusion of the poem ' the body/ tags along as promised to see what goes along', - evoking 'a process of perceptive opening, a sense of discovery', 380).

* 'Dreaming' is a term borrowed from the Aborigines, to describe the harmonious integration in their natural universe. Malouf strives for this integration of the interior and exterior worlds, Inhabiting a land, 'as settlers and latecomers', requires the reciprocity of possession and belonging , interiorising and reimagining it as native people have done(in an interview with Jennifer Levasseur and Kevin Malouf, *World View* 341-2) .This 'makes Writing as public dreaming' for Malouf. The reshaping of experience in the creativity of the writer's craft is a form of 'making',- - - 'what we are seeking when we set out there in the world some artefact'(Neustadt lecture 331).

Note on the text used : I have used Sati, Someshwar, Ed. *A Warble Of PostColonial Voices:An Anthology of Short Stories and Poems, Vol II:Poems*. Delhi: WorldView Publications,2015.
