

1 Oct. 19: Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (2008) to p.
2 78

3 **Style / servitude**

4 > The style in which this novel is written is quite interesting. It is written as a series of letters to
5 the Chinese Premier. Balram, the narrator (person writing the letter), makes it seem like he is
6 being friendly and innocent in his writing, but much of it is politically incorrect and just
7 offensive. Some of what he says is amusing, but often I find myself taken aback in disgust.
8 There is crude humor and a bit of morbidity in Balram's writing. The idea of him writing to this
9 Chinese Premier is amusing in itself, but he is not as reserved as he should be. I think that if this
10 person were real and actually took the time to read his letters, which is improbable, he would
11 be very offended if he did not have a strong sense of humor. Balaram does a lot of mocking and
12 this might reflect the thoughts of the author, Aravind Adiga.

13 ¶In this novel, we are presented with different levels of servitude: untouchables in the caste
14 system, "drivers," system with the landlords. The conflict of education is also presented. Balram
15 has to abandon his schooling and work to support his family. This makes him a "Half-Baked
16 Indian" instead of the white tiger he is meant to be.

17

18 **Gender**

19 >I really like this book so far. I was certainly not expecting the curt dialogue, but, for me, it
20 really makes the story. Balram is just so brutally honest, so likeable, that I sympathize with
21 every word he says (even, for some reason, when he admits to being a murderer)!

22 ¶What's strange about this reading is how the Indian *man* is experiencing slavery. Usually,
23 Indian stories revolve around injustice to women: how they have to succumb to arranged
24 marriages, how they can only go out when their husbands allow them to leave (usually to
25 perform errands), and how they must shield their identity in order to stay out of trouble.
26 Instead, Balram is experiencing these things, in a subtly different manner.

27 ¶As a female, I don't want to say that this is refreshing because, for obvious reasons, it's not. It
28 is just wonderful to read about an enslaved Indian man because it lessened the bias I felt
29 previous to this reading. I just hope that Balram maintains his likeability so that this remains
30 true.

31

32 **Animals / epistolary format**

33

34 >The animal imagery was very intriguing; it seems that animals represent positions of power.
35 The family's water buffalo is described as a "dictator," and the landlords are given names of

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36 animals that represent their personalities. The Stork would naturally be involved in the
37 marriages—if marriage and fertility destroys the men’s chance for education, then the Stork
38 represents, as the bringer of the children, the ultimate destruction of that opportunity—they
39 must labor for him (and for their families) instead of seeking to improve their minds and
40 advance in life. Lord Buddha is surrounded by harmless animals because he has essentially
41 subdued them through knowledge. The lizard is another animal that stands in the way of
42 education: Balram is so scared of it that he doesn’t want to return. Thus the destruction of the
43 beast: the lizard, and perhaps later the murder of his master, may symbolize freedom through
44 education. This may also be shown when Balram visits his family and they pay more attention
45 to him than to the buffalo for once.

46 I also wonder why he wrote the novel as letters...My guess thus far is that making it a first
47 person narrative makes everything personal but also subjective and unreliable, which works
48 perfectly with his trickster persona. However, I still can't make much of a connection with the
49 Chinese Premier.

50

51 **Light / darkness**

52 >The Light versus Dark theme struck me as, rather, intriguing. The narration allowed me to see
53 the perspective from the eyes of a person who knew what each side looked like. The abrupt
54 and, sometimes, vulgar attitude represented in the text allowed me to further compare the
55 narrator to the experiences he had described. From the river and his former village to the streets
56 of the city, every detail and description related, somehow, to the theme of Light and Dark.
57 Furthermore, the details allowed me to decipher the blur between his old life and his new life.
58 In other words, the change in lifestyle is so similar yet different that every detail and theme
59 helped me understand the concept behind the novel.

60

61 **River**

62 >I am really interested in the comparison you made between the river Ganga and the Ohio
63 River in America. I do not know what role the Ohio River plays as an emancipator in American
64 society, but I know that waterways do strike a special chord in the heart of American history.
65 When Balram began describing the Ganga I thought instantly of the Mississippi River and
66 started comparing the gory images Balram describes to images we have of our own formative
67 waterways. The Ganga is described as a river of death and disgust while we glorify the
68 Mississippi as the center of the delta with beautiful steamboats etc. What about the Mississippi
69 as a vehicle for trading slaves or the many horrid accidents that took place there? What do the
70 different descriptions say about glorified American history?

71

72 **Frederick Douglass**

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73 >I was amazed by the similarity in themes between this book and Frederick Douglass' narrative.
74 The masters are measured similarly (food and shelter), education is a means to personal
75 emancipation, the caste system is present and induces segregation and stereotypes of inferiority,
76 men remain "boys" and half baked, and there is a rite of passage where he leaves his family and
77 finds a new identity. It is the personal drive and determination in the soul that is the key factor.
78 In this book it is called an entrepreneurial spirit, Frederick was called a spoiled slave, but the
79 idea is the same. I am really enjoying this novel.

80

81 **Education**

82 >I'll begin with a quote: "I decided that this was how I would keep my education going forward
83 - that's the one good thing I'll say for myself. I've always been a big believer in education -
84 especially my own" (Pg. 43).

85 ¶I know I've commented (way) too much on education in our various readings, but I can't help
86 but notice a recurring theme: The name of our class is 'Liberation', and in almost every text
87 we've read for class, the first (and arguably, the most crucial) step that each protagonist has
88 taken towards the achievement of liberation is composed of educational processes. Douglass
89 learning how to read, Wright learning what to say and when to say it, and now Halwai's
90 eavedropping - each of these prove to be absolutely crucial steps in the obtainment of freedom.
91 In *The White Tiger*, Balram's brother Kishan serves as a foil for what Balram's fate might be if
92 these measures weren't taken: "Kishan had changed. He was thinner, and darker - his neck
93 tendons were sticking out in high relief above the deep clavicles. He had become, all of a
94 sudden, my father" (Pg. 73). With the addition of education (Bear with me - I know this sounds
95 broad, but I think it holds some bigger-picture significance) into Balram's life, we see a break in
96 the assumed social structure that his brother is not able to escape - a society where persons of a
97 lower socioeconomic status have children who will remain in that sphere - doomed to meet the
98 same fate as their fathers and mothers before them. While it would be a lie to say that Balram's
99 education is ALL his own doing (he seems to have a tendency to be in the right place at the
100 right time), it's hard to refute that his success is a product of his expanded opportunity. In your
101 notes, you cited a particularly interesting quote: "Even as a boy I could see what was beautiful
102 in the world: I was destined not to stay a slave". I know you brought into question the
103 comparison of this quote to other justifications of slavery (which, is a purpose it can very well
104 serve), but interpreted differently, it might hold a very different meaning; instead of
105 emphasizing the word "beauty", consider what Balram means when he says "see". What does it
106 mean to 'see'? The ability to internalize one's surroundings undoubtedly affects how one
107 continues to live among them.

108

109 **Odysseus**

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110

111 >I found these two quotes really interesting

112 1. '...whatever he had to do , he had done. He was the first entrepreneur I knew of...' Balram has
113 an admiration for Vijay because of what he has accomplished and not how he accomplished it.
114 This idea was definitely ingrained in him because he ended up killing to get his freedom and
115 wealth. This comment draws a parallel between Balram and Odysseus because to both of them,
116 the end justifies the means.

117 2.'...They are slaves because they can't see anything beautiful...'The idea behind education and
118 overcoming any other forms of abuse is to help one realise his potential or 'beauty' within
119 himself. If one realises this then the views and actions of others don't have to define him.

120

121 **Corruption**

122 > Corruption and its affect on the people of this book has an interesting spin to it at least from
123 the beginning. The thing that struck me the most was the corruption of a wedding. Something
124 that almost across any culture I can think of, marriage is a time for happiness on both sides of
125 the family. But in this context I see that it is not that way and that marriage on the part of the
126 female's side is an extreme burden because of the expected financial contributions. Balram's
127 family wound up having their whole family forced into work to pay off the loan from the
128 animal landlords. And when a male from Balram's side is finally married, the sentiment I took
129 from the procedure is that they finally had a chance to 'screw the other family really hard' when
130 it came to shelling out for the cost of the marriage.

131

132 **Various topics**

133 -I really enjoyed the language that the author has chosen to use. It is very colloquial and
134 conversational.

135 -I was very shocked that Balram would curse to Mr. Premier, but it does make the story more
136 interesting.

137 -The fact that he did not have a name until his teacher named him is very sad. What did his
138 childhood friends call him? Also the fact that he doesn't know his own age.

139 -Families live in one house and men and women are separated.

140 -Balram seems proud of his roots. He corrects the poster to give his father dignity.

141 -Why did he steal the money/where did he get it from?

142 -"You can't expect a man in a dung heap to smell nice"

143 -He has a lot of drive, he knew he was "destined not to stay a slave"

144 -By telling his story the reader can see the differences and corruption that is prevalent in India.

145 -The language of this book definitely kept me engaged; I also like the unique format. It
146 definitely is a good way to inform readers of what it's like to rise above one's status in India.

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148 >Re-reading the White Tiger is an interesting experience. Right off the back I noticed things that
149 I hadn't seen before. The first thing I saw was in the beginning, his letter/message to the
150 Premier. He doesn't say his name straight out, and discusses how what the premier requests to
151 see, he can tell him. He boasts over his criminal record, and his background. When he goes into
152 the four landlords and names, his descriptions of them and what they do is very attuned, and
153 leads to prove to the reader that he does indeed know what he is talking about. His unveiling of
154 society in India, Bangalore, and his town shows a true understanding of his surrounding and
155 general area.

156

157

158 >I really enjoyed the reading this time around, any work of literature that can get me to
159 sympathize with a murderer and thief is a compelling piece to me.

160 I had several observations, and some conclusion. The following are not listed in any particular
161 order:

162 (p.58) Dark bars separate the Indians of light and Indians of darkness.

163 (p.57) Being in the Darkness meant living outside of society. Servitude was a step up for Balram

164 (p.58)

165 (p.55) Balram sees his future employer's questions as tests and, like Odysseus, must be clever
166 and deceptive so that he can get what he wants.

167 (p.54) Social mobility found in an individual's capacity in his own agency.

168 (p.34) Slaves remain slaves because they lack in awareness of beauty, this presents the idea that
169 people are born to be slaves. Balram was not born to be a slave because he has an eye for
170 beauty.

171 (p.60)Water is presented here as a restorative, which is a sharp contrast from the association
172 with death it had earlier on (p.14). Water can restore but will not cleanse, as is demonstrated
173 with Balram in his attempt to try to wash the smell of his master's feet off of his hands (p.61).

174 (p.49) Balram exclaims "My first time!" In my opinion, this signifies a debasement of sexuality.
175 There is nothing romantic in this statement and it does not preserve, in intimacy, the
176 significance that ought to be essential to it. I guess, if we think about Maslow's hierarchy of
177 needs, this can be understood in as much as their basic needs are not met and so they will not
178 take time to preserve the romance in intimacy, what's more important is to make sure that they
179 live long enough to be intimate.

180 (p.38) Balram likens himself to the servant-god Hanuman. Balram likens himself to the devil (p.75).