**Ruins of a Great House by Derek Walcott**

Though our longest sun sets at right declensions and

makes but winter arches,

it cannot be long before we lie down in darkness, and

have our light in ashes. . .

Browne, Urn Burial

Stones only, the disjecta membra of this Great House,

Whose moth-like girls are mixed with candledust,

Remain to file the lizard's dragonish claws.

The mouths of those gate cherubs shriek with stain;

Axle and coach wheel silted under the muck

Of cattle droppings.

Three crows flap for the trees

And settle, creaking the eucalyptus boughs.

A smell of dead limes quickens in the nose

The leprosy of empire.

‘Farewell, green fields,

Farewell, ye happy groves!'

Marble like Greece, like Faulkner's South in stone,

Deciduous beauty prospered and is gone,

But where the lawn breaks in a rash of trees

A spade below dead leaves will ring the bone

Of some dead animal or human thing

Fallen from evil days, from evil times.

It seems that the original crops were limes

Grown in that silt that clogs the river's skirt;

The imperious rakes are gone, their bright girls gone,

The river flows, obliterating hurt.

I climbed a wall with the grille ironwork

Of exiled craftsmen protecting that great house

From guilt, perhaps, but not from the worm's rent

Nor from the padded calvary of the mouse.

And when a wind shook in the limes I heard

What Kipling heard, the death of a great empire, the

abuse

Of ignorance by Bible and by sword.

A green lawn, broken by low walls of stone,

Dipped to the rivulet, and pacing, I thought next

Of men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake,

Ancestral murderers and poets, more perplex4ed

In memory now by every ulcerous crime.

The world's green age then was rotting lime

Whose stench became the charnel galleon's text.

The rot remains with us, the men are gone.

But, as dead ash is lifted in a wind

That fans the blackening ember of the mind,

My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.

Ablaze with rage I thought,

Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake,

But still the coal of my compassion fought

That Albion too was once

A colony like ours, ‘part of the continent, piece of the

main',

Nook-shotten, rook o'erblown, deranged

By foaming channels and the vain expense

Of bitter faction.

All in compassion ends

So differently from what the heart arranged:

‘as well as if a manor of thy friend's. . . ‘

1. Analyse **Ruins of the Great House by Derek Walcott** on the basis of history, colonialism, literature and corruption through power?
2. Examine the impact of colonisation on colonised country in the poem  **Ruins of the Great House by Derek Walcott?**

Derek Walcott was born in a city of Caribbean; St Lucia. Most of Derek’s poems have the theme of different race, rulers and civilization. His style of writing is reflected in this poem because it revolves around the corrupted or decayed society. The title of the poem “Ruins of a Great House” suggest something is destroyed or decayed and he might be referring to the remains of the plantation house. Also, the great house suggests that the house may have belonged to royals or rich people and it can also be seen as a metaphor for death. The main themes in the poem are corruption, transience, classical civilisation and social classes.

**Ruins of a Great House** focuses on history, colonialism, literature and corruption through power. The poem reflects the period when British colonised great extent of the Caribbean during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, surroundings the lands with plantations where the black slaves were made to work and were subjected to abominable cruelties. It's a poem that reveals Walcott's ambivalence towards the culture of Great Britain, at its most dominant in the 18th and 19th centuries when slavery was a hugely profitable business

Ruins of a Great House opens by describing the ruins of a colonial house even the stones are not in a good condition. The dusts on the statues of beautiful girls who once lived and worked there are decaying even the remains of coaches half-buried in mud and cow dung. Three black crows settle in nearby trees symbolises the dead limes and deprosy emphasize once more the themes of death and decay. The marble of the ruined house reminds the speaker of similarly ruined marble in ancient Greece and in the Old South of the U. S. Trees and other plants once grew in the soil but have now died but some trees still survive, all it takes is probing with a shovel in the leaves in order to find skeletal remains of animals and humans remains from the time when the house was the centre of plantation based on the evil system of slavery.

The young men and the young women who were the masters and mistresses of the plantation have long since died, but the river flows now as it did when they lived and it seems almost soothing. The speaker climbed an elaborate iron wall. However, the wall could not prevent the house's decay – decay symbolized by worms and mice.

Readers get a clear view of how the society may have been like from his perspective with the help of imagery. *Grown in the silt that clogs the river’s skirt* this is an image of decay and loss of energy or validity; the word clogs means its lost its pieces or gone to pieces. Derek also mentions the society and the social classes *imperious rakes* refers to an empire that owns the slaves and are privileged, wealthy people. Throughout the poem there’s a contrast between now and then *girls gone is gone*, he’s comparing how the corrupted and decayed society has rotten away. There’s also use of metaphor by Derek *I climbed a wall with the grill ironwork of exiled craftsmen, protecting that great house from guilt* imagine him actually climbing up the wall which may suggest that he was part of the exiled craftsmen and he refers to suffering; the way they were treated. Also he mentions about *morality but not from the worm’s rent* suggest worms eating away your body but it’s ambiguous. There many references to different persons for example *Milton’s paradise*, *Kipling, Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake* makes it more realistic and believable. The line *of ignorance* shows taking advantage of people who don’t know anything. The names *Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake* are Elizabethan explorers, they were corrupted to get the British Empire going.

The poem suggests how Spanish or African people were murdered. There’s again a contrast between now and then *The world’s green age then was a rotting lime* shows how the world was then; corrupted and decayed. There’s again a reference to death *the charnel galleon’s text* it’s where you put a dead body (Charnel house) and the word *galleon’s* co-notates a hero. Towards the end of the poem Derek show’s his feelings and attitudes about the whole corrupted society *ember of the mind* images of embers refer to his anger. He mentions how he slaves suffered *rotting in this manorial lak* an allusion to the feudal system; words like these *Ablaze, rage, coal* all refer to his attitudes. Even at the end the comparison is still mentioned *That Albion too, was once* Albion is an ancient name for Britain and England itself was colonized by the Romans. The poem ends on a very affirmative point *All in compassion end* it suggest that in the end compassion is the dominating feeling and it didn’t end how the heart wanted it to or how it was planned.

The poem also explores the inevitable tensions arising between master and slave, perpetrator and victim, history and legacy, writer and conscience. Walcott uses:

*Metaphor*. The metaphorical use of a ruined plantation house as the former empire underpins the narrative.

*Metonym*. The lime fruit is a metonym for the British Empire. Lime plantations were particularly profitable and useful because lime fruits helped combat the scourge of scurvy aboard British naval ships.

*Allusion*. The English language and culture as expressed by notable writers such as Donne, Blake and Kipling and explorers Hawkins, Raleigh and Drake, is used to create a sense of irony and antipathy.

There is anger and reasoning and finally compassion, an acknowledgement that yes, those slaves who lived and worked here were subject to appalling injustices, yet those who were cruel came from a country that had also once been a colony, of the Romans.