

**“In his poem ‘Vultures’, Achebe gives us hope for the future.” Discuss, with close reference to the poem.**

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Look through the essay below, which was written in response to the above essay title. Use the specification, and assessment objectives, for your exam board to mark the essay. Don't just tick the essay at the end or write 'well done'; highlight or underline sentences or phrases that you think are particularly effective and make a note as to which of the assessment objectives they fit. Make a note of anywhere the essay could be improved and how this could be done (for example, don't just draw a cross next to something you don't agree with).

Once you have finished assessing the essay, compare your ideas with others in your group.

'Vultures' shows its reader a world of contrast; a place where good and evil can live alongside one another within the same being. The vulture may have "picked the eyes of a swollen corpse" but it is able to behave "affectionately" to its mate. The Commandant smells of "human roast" but is a "Daddy" and will "pick up a chocolate for his tender offspring". By the juxtaposition of these seeming opposites, Achebe shows his reader that there is always more than one way to look at a person, and that our first instincts and impressions may not be entirely accurate. In both cases, Achebe implies that the good outweighs the evil by portraying the good at the end of the description, thus leaving that thought in the mind of the reader. This also suggests that we, in our ordinary lives, should look for the good in people.

However, I believe that the message that he leaves us with is not one of hope, but rather the opposite. The final stanza again shows that there are contrasts within us all, but this time he leaves us with the negative image that "in the very germ of that kindred love is lodged the perpetuity of evil." The choice of the word "perpetuity" in itself is exceptionally negative, suggesting that despite the fact that even an ogre can have a "tiny glow-worm tenderness", evil will always prevail.

This is supported by the structure of the poem. There is no clear rhyme scheme, which makes the poem unpredictable to read. I believe that this links with the notion that people are unpredictable – they might look evil, but be good, or vice versa. However, I think that the enjambment in the poem is even more significant. We begin the poem with a description of "greyness and drizzle of one despondent dawn",

and this sense of despair runs on throughout the poem, implying that despair and evil are able to run on and on, ad infinitum. The language in the poem is largely negative, and images of the “charnel house” and the “human roast” are not, to me at least, outweighed by the positives of chocolate and affectionate bird behaviour.

In the final stanza, Achebe invites the reader to “praise bounteous providence if you will”. I believe that his choice of the pronoun here is significant – it implies that he does not “praise bounteous providence” at all, and that we might be naive if we choose to do so when we have evidence of such evil acts and behaviours. The overriding emotion that I am left with at the end of the poem is “despair” and so I do not think that this poem offers any meaningful hope for the future.