
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO CARIBBEAN POETRY

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will provide an introduction to the historical processes which have given the Caribbean islands their cultural and literary identity. The discussion will be with reference to the various ways in which the historical fact of colonisation imbricates peoples' minds. The direct consequence of this was slavery accompanied with attempts to eradicate through all means the traces of their own culture from the slave population's consciousness. I deal primarily with what I consider the most effective means employed to do so, the imposition of the colonisers' language and the subversion of this means of control by the slaves' use of creole. The pan-Caribbean dimensions of the politics of language is apparent from the writings of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Édouard Glissant. The unit concludes with a survey of twentieth century Caribbean poets' perception of history and the ideology informing their representations.

1.1 THE REGION

The term 'Caribbean' indicates the geographical region including all the territories associated with European powers like Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and others. The territories that were part of the British empire came together as the West Indian Federation in 1962. After the break-up of the federation the islands comprising it became independent in the 1960s. Even now there is a common cricketing team of the West Indians. Like sports, literature also continues to be considered regionally rather than nationally. Thus accounts like Stewart Brown's which discuss West Indian poetry are more common than those of Barbadian, St. Lucian or Trinidadian poetry. So the term 'West Indian' is based on the linguistic determinant of the use of English while 'Caribbean' emphasises geographical and historical determinants (Ashcroft *et al* 18).

1.1.1 Colonisation

At the time of Columbus's 'discovery' of Hispaniola in 1492 the Caribbean islands were inhabited by the Caribs who were in the process of subduing the culturally less

advanced tribes of the Tainos, the Arawaks and the Ciboneyes. It is from this date till about the middle of the sixteenth century that native depopulation took place in this region. A small number of African slaves came on Columbus's second voyage in 1494 and in 1498 six hundred Indians were shipped back to Spain. By the sixteenth century the demand for African slaves had increased in the wake of the decimation of the **Amerindian** tribes. In this period African slaves were being imported in large numbers first to work in mines and then as workers in sugar plantations. Following the capture of some of the islands by the British a sizeable population of West African slaves had been brought over by them as manual labour for the cultivation of sugarcane. If you have read Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* you will remember that Fanny's uncle Sir Thomas Bertram leaves England to look after his Antigua estates or that Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is married to Bertha Mason, the daughter of a Jamaican plantation owner. The above-given examples point to the fact that British authors were aware of the economic imperatives involved in its overseas dominions and their impact on the social structure at home.

The major European powers which sought control of the Caribbean were Britain, France and Spain. The development of the territories controlled by them followed almost the same pattern leading them to become "plantation colonies." However, the slave population differed significantly in these regions. In the Hispanic Caribbean islands the slaves comprised about fifty per cent of the total population whereas in the British and French Caribbean they formed eighty five to ninety per cent of the inhabitants. It should be obvious to you that the main motives for colonisation were economic. Here is what Aimé Césaire from Martinique, a former French Caribbean colony, has to say in response to the question, "What, fundamentally, is colonization?":

neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. . . . the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale, the competition of its antagonistic economies. (10-11)

I find this passage remarkable for the way in which Césaire here lists the religious, philanthropic, psychological, ethnographic, sociological and political justifications offered by the colonisers and demolishes any attempt on their part to show the innate superiority of European systems of social organization. Materialism in its legal and illegal forms is shown to be the primary motive behind the colonial enterprise. The ideological thrust of Césaire's work *Discourse on Colonialism* (1995) is a systematic defence of "Negro civilization," as the passage just quoted aptly demonstrates in its overturning of European civilizational superiority.

1.1.2 Resistance

The exploitation of the slaves by their colonial masters did not go unchecked. Resistance took many forms, primary among them being the slave revolts which occurred sporadically all over the Caribbean. In the sixteenth century there were revolts in various parts of the Hispanic Caribbean: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Honduras and New Spain. In the seventeenth century there was a series of slave revolts historians have labelled the "Akan revolts" in the British Caribbean island of Antigua. In 1655 when the British captured Jamaica from the Spanish some African slaves escaped to the hills. They joined others who were hunters and herdsman and who were

thoroughly familiar with the mountainous region. These were the first Maroons, a group which refused to accept slave status and resorted to guerrilla tactics to protect themselves. From 1690 to 1740 the Maroons were engaged in almost constant guerrilla warfare with the British forces. These risings did not imply that all the Africans were united in their struggle against slavery. For instance the Maroons, who had always been free, looked down upon the escaped slaves. This view included Creoles, that is, those slaves born on the islands, descendants of those who were transported through the **Middle Passage** from Africa to the New World. New arrivals from Africa, derisively known as Freshwater Negroes, were also looked down upon. There was also hostility between the Creole slaves and the Africans, the former accusing the latter of inciting them to rebellion. Hence the revolts which occurred during the sixteenth and seventeenth century were made less effective due to lack of cohesiveness. Historically the most important insurrection took place in the French Caribbean island of Haiti at San Domingo in 1791. Under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture (Pierre Domingo), a black man who had been a slave till the age of forty five, the San Domingo revolution culminated in the establishment of Haiti as the first black republic of the New World.

You may wonder why it is important for us to know about the history of resistance in the Caribbean. This is because the leaders of these struggles, men like Toussaint, became transformed into heroes in the popular imagination. Songs were sung about these victories, poems were written about them. Speaking about how he came to develop the concept of **Negritude**, Césaire, in an interview with the Haitian poet and militant René Depestre said: "Negritude [is] action. Haiti is the country where Negro people stood up for the first time, affirming their determination to shape a new world, a free world" (75). Explaining the concept of **Antillean** Negritude Césaire says "it was really a resistance to the politics of assimilation," and came into existence because "Antilleans were ashamed of being Negroes." Haiti represents for him "the heroic Antilles, the African Antilles . . . Haiti is the most African of Antilles. It is at the same time a country with a marvellous history: the first Negro epic of the New World was written by Haitians, people like Toussaint l'Ouverture, Henri Christophe, Jean Jacques Dessalines . . ." (72-74).

The case of Haiti illustrates the importance of successful resistance. Its effect on the creative imagination is evident in Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1939) where the first occurrence of the word Negritude coincides with an allusion to the Haitian fight for independence.

1.1.3 Emancipation

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the slave imports continued unabated. Between 1801 and 1807 sixty three thousand slaves were brought to the island of Jamaica. Oppression was practiced with a different emphasis, it was not so much physical as institutional violence which was the norm particularly after Britain was forced to abolish slavery in its territories due to growing pressure at home. Even though slavery ended by 1833 in the British colonies, all major decisions were made through the colonial office. Thirty thousand pounds per annum were granted for the education of former slaves. Religious and secular education was imparted in an effort to convert them into docile wage earners. The nineteenth century saw an intensified growth of both the formal church and authentic African cults. An important rising of this century was the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica. Largely a demand for control of their rightful share of the land which was under the absentee owners of large estates, the march to the Morant Bay court resulted in the execution of over four hundred people. Among those executed were Paul Bogle, a Baptist minister, and a coloured member of parliament, George William Gordon.

Violence against the peasantry took severe economic forms as well. Indentured labourers from China, India and some European countries were brought over to keep the wages low and the peasantry in a state of perpetual poverty. The opening decades of the twentieth century were years of economic crisis. Hurricanes and droughts

caused losses to the sugar industry which was already losing out to foreign competition in the world market. In spite of high levels of unemployment planters in Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad chose to bring over East Indian indentured labourers rather than pay high wages to local people. Due to unemployment there was widespread migration from rural areas into cities, the departure from the land being associated with a sense of spiritual loss.

1.2 LANGUAGE

1.2.1 Creole, creole, the creole continuum

Colonial control and resistance to it took the form of revolutions and battles. Language too is an effective medium for exerting control and battles can be fought on the linguistic terrain. Discussing the politics of language in African literature the Kenyan novelist, playwright and activist Ngugi wa Thiong'o states: "The domination of a people's language by the language of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised" (16). Applying this to the Caribbean situation one sees the various ways in which the slaves were discouraged from using their native languages. They were separated from other slaves of the same linguistic background because their masters feared that communication between them might lead to plans of escape or rebellion. The gradual erasure of the native language from their minds was accompanied with the use of creole, an adaptation of the coloniser's language. Please do not confuse between Creole and creole. Both words derive from the Spanish word "*criollo*" which means native born in the New World. However, the former (spelt with a capital C) was first used with pride by European colonists to refer to themselves as born and bred in the New World and was later used to distinguish slaves born in the Caribbean as distinct from those brought over from Africa. The latter, creole, (spelt with a small c) refers to any one of a family of languages developed in the Caribbean by African slaves in contact with one or more of the European languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese or Dutch). It became the first language for succeeding generations.

In any given region in the Caribbean a multitude of dialects interweave to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum, thus making the discourse "polyglossic or polydialectal" (Ashcroft *et al* 39). The theory of the creole continuum or more accurately the "post-creole speech continuum" arises out of this polyglossic situation. I shall explain what this means in simple terms. In a single speech community (say English speaking) people might use variants ranging from creolized forms at one end to language forms closer to standard (English) language at the other end. Most individuals command competence of a small range of varieties along the linguistic continuum, "the breadth of the span depending on the breadth of [their] social contacts" (Decamp qtd. in Donnell and Welsh 13). To put it simply, the more educated a person the more likely is he to speak the standard form of the language. Or a person might speak creole as the language of daily common contact and use the standard form at his place of work. This theory then affirms the notion of language as practice.

1.2.2 *creolité* and *antillanité*

The status of creole has been one of the most widely debated theoretical issues in the Caribbean. It is from the francophone Caribbean island of Martinique that most theoretical discussion has been produced. Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Edouard Glissant have given considerable attention to the disputed terrain of language in the Caribbean. Like the anglophone Caribbean islands, the francophone Caribbean faced linguistic imperialism. This was experienced in an intensified form in Martinique which continues to be an overseas department of France following a legislative act of 1948. When Césaire was born in 1913, Martinique, his "native land" was still a

French colony which bore the traces of three hundred years of slavery. He forwards the idea of breaking free from French literary traditions and of creating "a new language, one capable of communicating the African heritage" (*Discourse* 66-67). The creative expression of this is his *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1939). Although Césaire spoke of inscribing French with the African heritage he had a very conservative position on *créolité* or creolity, he said that it was already included in Negritude. His own knowledge of creole was very poor and he remarked on the low level of creolity which made it incapable of expressing abstract ideas.

Recently a group of Caribbean writers have adopted *créolité* as a key word and see themselves as direct descendants of Césaire. So although Césaire did not use creole himself, his work on language has inspired others who, even while acknowledging his influence, move away from some of the tenets of Negritude and embrace a more global and less essentially racial theory of *créolité*. Glissant for instance speaks of *antillanité* as "more than a theory, a vision," the word can be translated as Caribbeanness. Referring to the anglophone Antilles or English speaking Caribbean, Glissant comments that they distrust the theory of Caribbeanness but try to make it work. In *Caribbean Discourse* (1989) Glissant discusses the relationship between language and identity in an essay titled "Natural Poetics, Forced Poetics." Here creole is seen as an expression of forced poetics "created from the awareness of the opposition between a language that one uses and a form of expression that one needs" (121). This means that creole emerged from the clash of the language(s) used by the slaves which they were forbidden to speak in their new surroundings and the language of the colonial masters which they perforce needed to use for communication. Since creole was also the language used by the slaves to communicate with their owners it developed subversive strategies. According to Glissant the subversive potential inherent in its usage was a kind of conspiracy to conceal meaning by its public and open expression (125). He does not foresee the continuance of creole usage in Martinique but his views about the possibility of it being used in the anglophone Caribbean are optimistic. This is because although the people from these countries are as English as the Martinicans are French, "they do not want to be English" (Glissant 261). And it is this desire to be Caribbean not English which is reflected in Brathwaite's coinage of the term "nation language."

1.2.3 nation language/creole

Before I go on to outline Brathwaite's views on language I will point out some of the class-based assumptions associated with the use of creole. Commenting on the negro and the question of language in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Fanon focussed attention on the class dimension in the use of creole in Martinique. It was, as Fanon said, used only by the middle class to speak to their servants. Children were taught to avoid creolisms. He locates in this a colonialist strategy for alienating coloured people from their own civilization and culture. Recently Merle Hodge has observed that although creole is the main medium of communication in the Caribbean, the attitude of the people towards it is one of contempt, parents reprimand their children for using it. This, she says, has serious implications for the mental health since the deepest thought processes of the people are bound up in the structure of their language (Hodge, *Reader* 495).

The term "creolized English" refers to spoken English that has retained some obvious structural characteristics of creole while it develops more of the features of internationally accepted spoken English. I have pointed out above how the use of creole is looked down upon so it is no wonder that in the anglophone Caribbean there is a move towards the use of standard English. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* distinguish between English and what they call "post-colonial englishes" to indicate the forms taken by this language in post-colonial societies. Creolized English would, in the terms set out by the authors of this book, be an example of the "linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world" (Ashcroft *et al* 8). The term "non-standard forms of English" when applied to creoles can be taken in a pejorative sense

but I think what Ashcroft *et al* are emphasizing are variations in the use of the language rather than passing any value judgement on “englishes.” Quite often creoles are erroneously considered to be approximate language systems whereas in fact they are language systems in their own right, with considerably sophisticated syntax and lexicons. Brathwaite’s term “nation language” affirms a positive status for an English “influenced by the underground language, the submerged language that the slaves had brought” (262). It is a non-standard form of English inasmuch as its syntax, rhythm and timbre is concerned. Brathwaite contrasts “nation language” with dialect which is thought of as “bad English.” Like Glissant, Brathwaite outlines the subversive potential in the use of nation language because it is the submerged area of a dialect which is closely related to the “African aspect of experience in the Caribbean” (266). Its characteristic features are its orality and musicality and its effect is lost if it is written down (270-71). Brathwaite’s own poetry, much of which is performative, concretises the “total effect” of nation language. The importance of Brathwaite’s coinage of the term and his explication of its meaning lies in the revolutionary potential he attributes to language as an effective means of cultural resistance. It does away with the traditional denigration of creole and asserts its efficacy as a means of literary expression.

1.3 LITERATURE

1.3.1 creole poetry

Claude McKay’s collections *Songs of Jamaica* (1912) and *Constab Ballads* (1912) provide one of the earliest instances of the use of creole for literary purposes. McKay (1899-1940) was born in Jamaica and was a policeman in the constabulary there for some years before emigrating to the States. There he became a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance so much so that he is often thought of as an American poet. Brathwaite calls McKay’s first two books of poetry published in 1912 “the first all-dialect collections from an anglophone Caribbean poet” (275). Here is an extract from the ending of his poem titled “A Midnight Woman to the Bobby”:

Say wha’? res’ me? - you go to hell!
 You t’ink Judge don’t know unno well?
 You t’ink him givin’ go sentence me
 Wid out a soul fe witness I? (Reader 66)

Here the “midnight woman,” probably a prostitute, is expressing her indignation at the high-handedness of the policeman. What I want to bring to your notice in the lines given above is the immediacy and resilience of ordinary speech patterns. The woman challenges the policeman to arrest her, then says that the judge knows all about him and won’t sentence her without any witnesses to the crime (of soliciting customers) she is charged with. The creole words used here are “unno,” which means “you” collectively and “fe” which is a preposition widely used in narrative dialogue to indicate “for.” On the basis of the language he uses one would expect McKay’s poetry to be called nation language poetry. However, he is denied the status of a nation language poet by Brathwaite primarily because of his “literary colonialism and primordial anglicanism” as evinced in his early works. According to Brathwaite, McKay let himself be “imprisoned in pentameter” (275). This clearly indicates that it is not merely the words used, but also the ideology espoused by an author in his choice of structure, style and content which raises a poem from dialect to nation language. So although McKay’s is creole poetry, in Brathwaite’s view, it does little in terms of the “revolutionary” impact language can be made to possess.

I cite Brathwaite’s views on McKay only to indicate how what is new may not be perceived as entirely radical. This does not in any way undermine his achievement or his influence on later poets. McKay’s insistence on the value of everyday speech and

experience and his interest in folk traditions in these early collections is one of the first instances of a re-version of the paradigms of what constitutes literariness in poetry. This is also evident in the poetry of Una Masson (1905-65) and Louise Bennett (b.1919-) and has led to problems in the critical reception of their work. Bennett's poetry in particular is primarily oral in its thematic and structural principles. Here are a few lines from her poem "Jamaica Oman":

Jamaica oman, cunny, sah!
Is how dem jinnal so?
Look how long dem liberated
An de man dem never know!

Look how long Jamaica oman
-Modder, sister, wife, sweetheart -
Outa road an eena yard deh pon
A dominate her part!

(Reader 145)

Notice that the style is similar to McKay's, with a similar omitting of certain letters in a word (like the w from woman) and use of creolisms. In the first line it is said that the Jamaican woman is cunning, a quality revealed in "jinnal" or the ability to find quick solutions to a difficulty. The poet makes a feminist statement when she says that these women have been "liberated" for a long time without letting the men have any knowledge of it. In the same poem Bennett goes on to say that long before women's liberation was heard of, the Jamaican women had chalked out their plans. It is a part of her feminist agenda that she chooses to write in everyday speech and about ordinary experiences. She is also a performer of her own poetry and is a pioneering figure in the oral traditions of Caribbean poetry. The titles of some of her other poems "Bed-time story," "Proverbs" indicate her close connections to folk traditions. In her poetry there is a conscious rejection of imposed traditions and imitative style. In an interview with Dennis Scott she has talked about her reasons for writing in dialect: "I began to wonder why more of our poets and writers were not taking more of an interest in the kind of language usage and the kind of experiences of living which were all around us, and writing in this medium of dialect instead of writing in the same old English way about Autumn and things like that" (*Hinterland* 47).

I hope that you have understood why the use of creole for poetic purposes was so important. First, it indicated an acceptance of non-standard forms of the English language even if it continued to be called "dialect" both by the practitioners and their critics. Second, at least for some of the poets who used creole, it marked a break from slavish imitation of English poetry ("Autumn and things like that"). Finally, and this is linked to the second reason, it was the language which could most suitably express the Caribbean or the local reality perceived by the poet.

1.3.2 History and poetry

In discussing poetic uses of creole I have tried to emphasise the resistance to the language and poetic forms of the coloniser. It would be simplistic to say that Caribbean poetry, like Caribbean history, is an expression of almost continuous resistance, whether stylistic or thematic. Edward Baugh in *West Indian Poetry 1900-1970: A Study in Cultural Decolonisation* traces the earliest poetic expressions of the West Indian situation and affirms: "The development of poetry in the West Indies reflects the colonial experience of the region" (*Reader* 100). According to Baugh, poets before 1940 produced a "strictly colonial poetry" influenced by the Neo-classical, Romantic and Victorian poetry of the "mother country," Britain. It is easy to see that such generalisations are inapplicable in many cases when applied to pre-1940 poetry like McKay's early collections. Baugh's definition of "colonial poetry" does not merely include poetry which glorifies or endorses colonialism but also that which, although it might be rooted in local reality and express patriotic sentiments, is servilely imitative of the trends in English poetry. An instance of the former is to be

found in Albinia Hutton's poem "A Plea" (1932) in which Britain is seen as a caring mother and the inhabitants of the colonies as her children:

We have our Christian names, and what they are
Thou knowest, nay, who knowest half so well
As thou dost, thou the Mother? Canada,
South Africa, Australia, India,
New Zealand. Far too numerous to tell,

With them a host of smaller gems as fair
Sweet pearls ingathered from the Summer Seas
And strung together for a necklet rare
To deck thy queenly bosom, shining there
In loveliness, Jamaica is of these.

(Reader 55)

This has been called the "gendering of colonial affiliation" as evinced by Britain being personified as the queenly mother who is adorned ("smaller gems," "sweet pearls," "necklet rare") with her colonies. Such a clear acknowledgement and endorsement of Britain's supremacy is also present in the poetry of Tom Redcam and J.E. McFarlane. In Redcam's poem "O, Little Green Island Far Over the Sea" (1929) the feelings of nostalgia and admiration for England mingle with his love for Jamaica, the Caribbean island he had adopted as his home:

For England is England, the strong and the true,
Whose word is her bond in her march through the blue.

.....
But my little Green Island, far over the sea,
At eve-tide, Jamaica, my heart turns to thee.

(Reader 46)

It was not as if all the poetry written in the first half of the twentieth century was jingoistic in tone or imitative in style. In 1904 Mary Adella Walcott, under the pseudonym of Tropica, wrote about various aspects of plantation culture: the slaves, the big houses run efficiently by coloured servants cum housekeepers called "Nanas" and "Bushas" or overseers on cane and banana plantations. Her poem "The Undertone" has for its epigraph two lines from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." The "still sad music of humanity" whose undertone can be caught beneath "the brightness of the Southern day" is the "far, faint cry of wounded slaves in chains." The guilt-ridden past and attempts to obliterate it by dismissing it as "nonsense" and "old nurses' tales" is foregrounded in this poem which makes no claims to British superiority in order to justify colonialism.

In his later poetry Claude McKay fixes the blame for the colonial guilt expressed in the writings of Mary Adella Walcott and other white poets. Written in standard English his poems "In Bondage" and "Outcaste" (both 1953) express a longing for the African past lost forever by forced emigration to the New World. The nostalgia for a "native clime" is juxtaposed with "the white man's menace" which made black people "simple slaves" of "ruthless slaves," the latter being the white masters who were enslaved to "insatiate lust" for power. These expressions of oppression are balanced by poetic articulations of moments of resistance. Mervyn Morris's (b.1937) short poem "The House Slave" captures succinctly the aftermath of a slave rebellion through the thoughts of a slave left alone in the house abandoned by his former master: "And these are my rooms now:/ My pallid masters fled,/ freeing the only home I knew" (*Hinterland* 167). Significantly the slave does not use the word "freedom" in connection with himself, he applies it only to the house. This indicates an internalisation of oppression which does not lift even under changed circumstances. And yet there are poetic expressions which move beyond the past towards an optimistic future. Vera Bell's 1948 poem "Ancestor on the Auction Block" takes cognizance of the humiliating past of slavery only to signal towards

emancipation: "My freedom is within myself." The poem also indicates the role played by the ancestors, who were slaves, in the birth of a "country":

Within your loins I see the seed
Of multitudes
From your labour
Grow roads, aqueducts, cultivation
A new country is born
Yours was the task to clear the ground
Mine be the task to build.

(Reader 156)

The last line of Bell's poem points to a sense of responsibility felt by the poetic persona who feels the need to "build" upon the foundations laid by the ancestor.

One of the main concerns of post-1950 Caribbean poetry is to "build" a literary edifice not based on European models but reflective of Caribbean reality. Here is the narrator of Olive Senior's (b.1943-) poem "Cockpit Country Dreams" who remembers her mother showing her photo albums of "black ancestors" and telling her that "Herein/ Your ancestry, your imagery, your pride./ Choose *this* river, *this* rhythm, *this* road./ Walk good in the footsteps of *these* fathers" (*Hinterland* 218). The title of the poem derives from cockpits, deep depressions or glens found in the mountains of Jamaica. This was the rugged terrain preferred by the Maroons, people who refused to accept their slave status. The child in the poem feels a sense of cultural maroonage or alienation from the reality around her. Her mother's exhortation does not suffice to keep her mind "slipping/ those well-worn grooves of piety, work, praise" and she feels "drown[ed] in the other's history" (*Hinterland* 218, 219). The idea that the Caribbean is a region without history "discovered" by Europe, from which discovery its history is said to begin, was perpetuated by colonial historiographers. Arguments countering this view include the attempts to make available the hitherto undocumented facets of Caribbean history: cultures of the tribes existing before Columbus's arrival, slave rebellions during the era of colonialism, existence of communities like the Maroons and the continuance of African traditions in the Caribbean. I have discussed this in greater detail in Unit 6.

As has previously been mentioned, the Caribbean became home to people from Asia who came as indentured labour and then stayed on. In trade, commerce, religion, food, dress, music and language, the descendants of these emigrants, particularly the Indians and the Chinese, have influenced Caribbean culture in a major way. In Guyana and Trinidad over half the current population are of East Indian descent. V.S. Naipaul is perhaps the best known Indo-Caribbean writer of our times. The writers of these ethnicities have documented their ancestors' and their own presence in the Caribbean. Writing in the 1980s. Mahadai Das in her poem "They Came in Ships" attempts to link the arrival of indentured labourers or "Coolies" with the coming of African slaves. At the same time she is fully aware of the very different socio-historical conditions which led to these two "diasporas" to the Caribbean. Cyril and David Dabydeen from Guyana have also voiced the diasporic consciousness of people of Indian origin from a very different perspective. Their bonding with the Caribbean is one with an "imaginary homeland" since they have opted to migrate to Canada and Britain respectively. In his poems David Dabydeen speaks both of Indians in the Caribbean as in "Coolie Mother" and also of those chosen few like the "Coolie Son" who migrate to the first world in search of better prospects. Ironically the coolie mother who wants her son to "Learn talk proper, take exam, go to England university,/ Not turn out like he rum-sucker chamar dadée" receives a letter from her coolie son who is a toilet attendant in England (*Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry* 62-63). Notice the use of words like "chamar" and "coolie" and observe how Hindi words have become a part of Caribbean poetic vocabulary.

I have chosen to give examples from Indo-Caribbean poetry in the last part of this section. This does not in any way indicate that only poets of Indian descent have had

an impact on the Caribbean literary and cultural scenario. The writers of Chinese, Portuguese, Irish and Syrian ancestry have also contributed significantly to the eclectic nature of Caribbean literature and society.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

From a Eurocentric perspective Caribbean history is said to begin with Columbus's arrival in 1492. The colonisation of the region was based on economic imperatives and consisted largely of forced migration of Africans as slaves who were denied even linguistic freedom. Almost continuous resistance, whether on the level of language through the use of creole or on the level of combat through the existence of Maroons, characterises the three hundred years of oppression. A variety of stances are evident in Caribbean poetry: the colonialist impulse which leads to jingoistic and imitative poetry like the work of Albinia Hutton; the anti-colonial strategies as evinced in the use of creole language by Claude McKay and Louise Bennett and finally poetry expressing post-colonial concerns of multi-culturalism, hybridity, diaspora. These concerns have been voiced by writers of various ethnicities including those belonging to East Asian Caribbean communities like Cyril and David Dabydeen. The Caribbean culture is a site of amalgamation and assimilation of many different cultures: Amerindian, European, African and Asian. The term creolization when applied in the sense of the development of marked Caribbean characteristics can serve as an apt metaphor for its cultural syncretism.

1.5 GLOSSARY

Amerindian :	A member of the Mongoloid race of people whose many 'tribes' were the original inhabitants of the Caribbean and the Americas.
Antilles :	Collective name for all the Caribbean islands except The Bahamas. Conceived of as falling into two broad groups - the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico) and the Lesser Antilles comprising all the other islands to the East and South of these four.
Dialect :	Subordinate variety of a language with non-standard vocabulary, pronunciation or idioms.
Diaspora (in <i>this</i> context):	A term used for large scale migration of people from the country of their origin to other countries, either voluntarily or due to economic or political compulsions. When we speak of the Indian diaspora we mean Indians settled in England, America, Africa, the Caribbean. Similarly one can discuss the Caribbean diaspora to England, Canada and France.
Middle Passage:	The sea journey from Africa to the Caribbean which represents the temporal moment when the slaves were dislocated from Africa.
Negritude:	A word coined by Aimé Césaire defining the qualities of the values of Black civilisation in the world. It provided a positive image of race for Black people. It was criticised for its essentialist racial approach.

1.6 QUESTIONS

- Q. 1. How does Caribbean poetry reflect the region's experience of colonisation? Support your answer with examples.
- Q. 2. Write a note on the poetry of Caribbean writers of Indian descent.
- Q. 3. What were origins of the use of creole English in Caribbean poetry? Explain with reference to any **one** early twentieth century poet.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

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Theoretical Material

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UNIT 2 DEREK WALCOTT - I

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 St. Lucia
- 2.2 Derek Walcott
 - 2.2.1 Poet
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 - 2.2.3 Dramatist
- 2.3 *Crusoe's Journal*
 - 2.3.1 Literary Source/Post-colonial Re-source
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are (a) to provide information about Derek Walcott's life and work as a poet, painter, dramatist and essayist, (b) to look at a representative selection of his poetry till 1980. The major themes and concerns of Walcott's poetry will be indicated through a detailed analysis of each of the poems included in this unit. You can begin by reading the poem and looking up the difficult words in the glossary accompanying it. Then read the poem along with its analysis. Finally think about how the poems reflect various aspects of Caribbean culture, what stance the poet has towards it, and how it is similar to or different from the poets discussed in the previous unit.

2.1 ST. LUCIA



Walcott was born in 1930 on the island of St. Lucia which is a member of the Eastern Caribbean Association formed after the collapse of the West Indian Federation in 1962. The island is on the Windward side of the Caribbean basin along with Grenada, Martinique, St. Vincent, Grenadines and Dominica. In the 1500s and 1600s Britain and France fought for control over these islands. The culture of St. Lucia reflects the duality of the colonial powers that contended for it for over 160 years. In 1804 the English acquired control but the French left their mark on the language and customs of the island which had a population of mainly Africans or part-Africans. The French influence is also visible in Roman Catholicism which is still the principal religion of the island. Most of the St. Lucian population is bilingual or even trilingual but more comfortable in French creole than in any other language. Walcott is of African and English parentage and has called his boyhood “schizophrenic.” In an interview with Robert Hamner he said, “I have not only a dual racial personality but a dual linguistic personality. My real language, and tonally my basic language, is patois.” Walcott’s poetry reveals the interpenetration of languages: French creole, English creole, English and even European languages like Latin. As has been observed by commentators on Walcott’s language, there are small examples of “West Indian vocabulary” placed in “a Standard English setting.” Walcott has written about his “illegitimacy” in the West Indian tradition in his essay “What the Twilight Says: An Overture” (“WTS”). Here he calls himself “this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian” (10). His poetry reflects this hybridity both at the level of language as well as identity. The title of his poem on St. Lucia is “Sainte Lucie,” the creolization indicating the exploration of language thematized in it. Similarly one of his early poems “A Far Cry from Africa” expresses this theme of an hybrid identity:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this African and the English tongue I love?
(*Collected Poems*, hereafter CP, 18)

When I discuss Walcott’s poetry I will point out further elaborations on the theme of hybridity, a much discussed concept in post-colonial theory. One of these is the feeling of dis-location experienced by the individual who feels a sense of rootlessness in the culture of his/her origin. Walcott was born in St. Lucia, received “a sound colonial education” there, studied and worked in Jamaica and Trinidad for some time, but since the 1970s he has been teaching in the United States. However, the Caribbean and St. Lucia in particular continues to impress on his creative imagination. In his epic poem, *Omeros* (1990), modelled on Homer’s *Odyssey*, he presents St. Lucia as “the Helen of the West Indies” because thirteen battles were fought for its control by rival colonial powers. And yet the poet feels a sense of dissociation from his island when he returns there. This is expressed in “The Light of the World” in which he represents St. Lucia by means of female figures, but as he passes from the town to the hotel he says it is full of “transients” like himself. St. Lucia’s history, language and culture are constituents of the structure of feeling which informs Derek Walcott’s multigeneric creativity. It is to the various aspects of this that I will now draw your attention.

2.2 DEREK WALCOTT

2.2.1 Poet

When Walcott was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992 the Swedish Academy made a special mention of his epic poem *Omeros*. Regarded as his *magnum opus* this poem transposes Homeric characters to a St. Lucian setting to make the epic reflect Caribbean reality. Walcott has never been reticent about

acknowledging that the major influences on his poetic career have been European and American. Among the poets he most enjoys reading are Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Edward Thomas. He admits to have written poems in the manner of Eliot and Auden at the beginning of his poetic career. That his acknowledgement of influence might lead to the charge of imitation or non-originality is a danger Walcott is well aware of. His self-confidence in such acknowledgements stems from what he calls a "tribal accent." He believes that people in many of the erstwhile colonies who "grow up speaking the English language" experience no "alienation" from it and hence their claim that the language belongs to them is justified. Imitation arises only when these speakers forget their "tribal accent" and try to speak in imitation of the accent of the original tongue. To this end he has never thought of himself as an English writer but has let native rhythms permeate his work so that it is not one particular writer which has influenced him but rather "Literature" in general (Brown and Johnson, 176-77). Walcott's early poetry is full of echoes from canonical texts of European literature. This is especially evident in collections like *In A Green Night* (1962) where the title poem refers to Marvell, *The Castaway and Other Poems* (1965) and *The Gulf* (1970). In his later poetry the work of New World poets like St. John Perse from Guadeloupe, Aimé Césaire from Martinique and Pablo Neruda from Chile is often acknowledged as providing poetic models. Walcott's friendship with contemporary poets like Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, Robert Lowell and Ted Hughes has also played a part in his poetic development. Through Brodsky he links himself to the Russian poet Mandelstam and through Lowell to the idea of America evinced in his later poetry.

I point out all these varied influences to counter Walcott's appropriation as an English poet in recent critical scholarship on the one hand and his dismissal on grounds of unoriginality on the other. Like T.S. Eliot's idea of tradition and the individual talent, Walcott's formulations about a poetic tradition emphasise its continuity: "The new poet enters a flux and withdraws, as the weaver continues the pattern, hand to hand and mouth to mouth, as the rock-pile convict passes the sledge" ("The Muse of History," henceforth "MH"). This last comparison between the poet and the convict links the exercise of the poetic craft to the idea of a continuity of enforced labour. The way Walcott perceives poetry it becomes a laborious exercise with the poet being chained to his craft much like a convict. Given the history of slavery and enforced labour in the Caribbean this seems to me a particularly apt metaphor for describing his postcolonial poetics.

2.2.2 Painter

Walcott's artistic development has been strongly imprinted by his father's work as a painter. Although Warwick Walcott died when Walcott was an infant, he left behind water colour paintings which, in the author's own words, "gave me a kind of impetus and a strong sense of continuity. I felt that what had been cut off in him somehow was an extension that I was continuing." For a long time Walcott veered between painting and poetry. He has continued painting over the years and has had important relationships with the painters Harry Simmons and Dunstan St. Omer, a childhood friend, to whom some of his poems are dedicated. In Chapter 9 of *Another Life* Walcott speaks of abandoning his painterly ambitions for poetry:

I hoped that both disciplines might
by painful accretion cohere
and finally ignite,
but I lived in a different gift,
its element metaphor.

Nevertheless, as Rei Terada has observed, his poetry "often considers the arts' interrelations" and his poems "quietly merge the verbal with the visual" (119). The evanescence of both painting and poetry is a theme often expressed in his work. It is from his interest in the visual arts that the landscape descriptions in his poetry draw

their concreteness and detail. Visual extravagance in Caribbean art and literature is something he defends with reference to Greek art. According to him the Greek sculptures were painted very brightly unlike the bleached out quality they're now associated with: "All the purple and gold . . . is very Caribbean, that same vigor and elation of an earlier Greece, not a later Greece . . ." (Brown and Johnson 183). With such correspondences in mind it is easy to see why Walcott chose Homer's Greek epic as the model for his Caribbean epic *Omeros*.

2.2.3 Dramatist

In "What The Twilight Says: An Overture," the essay which forms the introduction to a selection of Walcott's early plays, he describes "two pale children" watching the drama being enacted on the streets from an upstairs window. Reading this account about how these children created their "little theatre" of men made from twigs it is easy to conceive how Derek and his twin brother Roderick Walcott grew up to be the most significant Caribbean playwrights of this century. In 1950 Walcott along with Maurice Mason founded the Arts Guild of St. Lucia. When he left the island to take up a scholarship at the University of West Indies the leadership of the Guild was taken over by Roderick. It was in Trinidad that Walcott's plays *The Sea at Dauphin* and *Henri Christophe* were first staged in the 1950s. In 1958 the highpoint of the celebrations to herald the inauguration of the West Indies Federation was an open air production of the epic drama written by Walcott-titled *Drums and Colours*. In 1959 Walcott formed the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, one of the most influential groups working in theatre at that time. In his essays and interviews Walcott has described his twenty year struggle to form a professional theatre company and the sense of failure which he felt at its break up. The note of despondency is summed up succinctly in the statement: "In these new nations art is a luxury, and the theatre the most superfluous of amenities" ("WTS" 7).

Over the years many of Walcott's plays have drawn upon folklore for source material. In the fifties and sixties the plays *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* and *Dream on a Monkey Mountain* drew upon folk tales and legends. Versions of European classics include *The Joker of Seville* and an adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Walcott is an extremely prolific playwright whose plays have been performed all over the world. For many of his plays he draws upon the traditions of popular culture in the Caribbean specially the Carnival which has been called theatre on the streets. Coming from a region of the world where the theatre is all around "in the streets at lampfall in the kitchen doorway," it is no wonder that the region's most famous poet should also be its best known playwright.

2.3 CRUSOE'S JOURNAL

2.3.1 Literary Source/Post-colonial Resource

The title of this poem points at its literary source, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* published in 1791. The poem reworks the associations this literary character conjures with the aim of abrogating it for specifically voicing post-colonial concerns. You would remember that Defoe's novel is about a man shipwrecked on an island who, being the only survivor, fends for himself making the best use of what he can salvage from the wreck and of the resources available on the island. During the course of his long stay on the island he rescues a savage from cannibals whom he later names Friday. Friday becomes Crusoe's companion and servant on the island. I hope this outline has refreshed your memory of the text and you can see how the narrative can be read as being about colonisation. Crusoe is the discoverer and coloniser of the island, if only an unwilling one, since it is his misfortune to be stranded there. He longs for human company but in Friday he finds a savage whom he must civilize by teaching him the English language and Christian morality. The hierarchical relation between the two is reinforced by Friday calling Crusoe "Master."

Can you think of any other canonical English work which can also be interpreted in this manner? Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* immediately comes to my mind. In the play Prospero, the deposed duke of Milan cast adrift on a boat with his daughter Miranda, lands on a lonely island inhabited by the witch Sycorax who has kept spirits imprisoned. The witch's son Caliban is the sole inhabitant of the island when Prospero lands on it. With the aid of his magic Prospero frees the spirits and keeps Caliban in his service having taught him his language so that he can obey orders. Prospero's control over the island and its original inhabitants like Ariel and Caliban can be seen as another narrative of colonisation.

The similarity between these two examples of canonical texts which can be read in this way should be clear to you. Pay special attention to the fact that both Crusoe and Prospero teach their language to the savages they control.

Both *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest* have been subject to many such readings. In 1960 George Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile* dismantled the hierarchy of Prospero, Ariel and Caliban to see Caliban as a West Indian whose human status is negated by the European who denied him his inheritance. In 1969 Aimé Césaire reworked the play in an African context rewriting it in French (Ashcroft *et al* 189). Walcott's poetic rendition of the figure of Crusoe in this and other poems is one of the earliest re-readings of Defoe's classic text. It is useful to remember that Defoe based his story on the experiences of Alexander Selkirk. Selkirk was a member of a privateering expedition. Having quarrelled with his captain he asked to be put ashore on the island of Juan Fernandez in 1704. He remained on the island till 1709 when he was rescued by a ship. So the context of the original work is not unlinked to the mercenary motives of colonial enterprise. There have been other interpretations of Defoe's novel in recent times. In 1986 the South African novelist J.M. Coetzee published *Foe*, a fictional re-interpretation in which the narrator is a white, female castaway who tells her story to "Robinson Crusoe." It is later that the reader comes to know that the narrator is addressing her story to "Daniel Foe" so that he can write about it. The latter part of the novel is in the form of her journal. Coetzee chooses to write the novel from the point of a woman indicating the masculinist ethos of an adventure novel like Defoe's. Walcott's agenda in this poem seems to be to posit Crusoe as a New World Adam from whose journals "the language of a race" took its present form. The language is of course English but adapted to the surroundings Crusoe finds himself in. Through his journals it also becomes the language of those who succeed him. The post-colonial poetics is evident in Friday's claim to what was initially an imposed language.

2.3.2 The Text

Crusoe's Journal

*I looked now upon the world as a thing remote, which I
had nothing to do with, no expectation from, and, indeed,
no desires about. In a word, I had nothing indeed
to do with it, nor was ever like to have; so I thought
it looked as we may perhaps look upon it hereafter,
viz., as a place I had lived in but was come out
of it; and well might I say, as Father Abraham
to Dives, "Between me and thee is a great gulf fixed."
—ROBINSON CRUSOE*

Once we have driven past Mundo Nuevo trace
safely to this beach house
perched between ocean and green, churning forest
the intellect appraises
objects surely, even the bare necessities
of style are turned to use,

like those plain iron tools he salvages
 from shipwreck, hewing a prose
 as odorous as raw wood to the adze;
 out of such timbers
 came our first book, our profane Genesis
 whose Adam speaks that prose
 which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself
 with poetry's surprise,
 in a green world, one without metaphors;
 like Christofer he bears
 in speech mnemonic as a missionary's
 the Word to savages,
 its shape an earthen, water-bearing vessel's
 whose sprinkling alters us
 into good Fridays who recite His praise,
 parroting our master's
 style and voice, we make his language ours,
 converted cannibals
 we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ.

All shapes, all objects multiplied from his,
 our ocean's Proteus;
 in childhood, his derelict's old age
 was like a god's. (Now pass
 in memory, in serene parentheis,
 the cliff-deep leeward coast
 of my own island filing past the noise
 of stuttering canvas,
 some noon-struck village, Choiseul, Canaries,
 crouched crocodile canoes,
 a savage settlement from Henty's novels,
 Marryat or R.L.S.,
 with one boy signalling at the sea's edge,
 though what he cried is lost.)
 So time, that makes us objects, multiplies
 our natural loneliness.

For the hermetic skill, that from earth's clays
 shapes something without use,
 and, separate from itself, lives somewhere else,
 sharing with every beach
 a longing for those gulls that cloud the cays
 with raw, mimetic cries,
 never surrenders wholly, for it knows
 it needs another's praise
 like hoar, half-cracked Ben Gunn, until it cries
 at last, "O happy desert!"
 and learns again the self-creating peace
 of islands. So from this house
 that faces nothing but the sea, his journals
 assume a household use:
 we learn to shape from them, where nothing was
 the language of a race,
 and since the intellect demands its mask
 that sun-cracked, bearded face
 provides us with the wish to dramatize
 ourselves at nature's cost,
 to attempt a beard, to squint through the sea-haze,
 posing as naturalists,
 drunks, castaways, beachcombers, all of us

yearn for those fantasies
of innocence, for our faith's arrested phase
when the clear voice
startled itself saying "water, heaven, Ch'ist,"
hoarding such heresies as
God's loneliness moves in His smallest creatures.

Glossary

hewing:	to chop or cut
odorous:	diffusing fragrance
adze:	tool for cutting away the surface of wood
Genesis:	first book of the Old Testament with an account of the Creation
Christofer:	Christopher Columbus
mnemonic:	designed to aid the memory
Proteus:	a minor sea-god in Homer's <i>Odyssey</i> who has the power to assume different shapes
derelict:	person abandoned by society
leeward:	towards the sheltered side
canoe:	slender wooden boat with pointed or open ends
Henty:	George Alfred Henty (1832-1902), a war correspondent most famous as the author of stories for boys mainly based on military history. The best remembered of these are <i>Out in the Pampas</i> (1868), <i>The Young Buglers</i> (1880), <i>Under Drake's Flag</i> (1883) and <i>With Clive in India</i> (1889).
Marryat:	Captain Frederick Marryat (1792-1848), a naval captain, wrote several novels of sea life among them <i>Midshipman Easy</i> (1836), most famous for his children's books especially <i>The Settlers in Canada</i> (1844) and <i>Children of the New Forest</i> (1847).
R.L.S.:	Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94). His first full length novel was <i>Treasure Island</i> (1883) followed by <i>The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> (1886). Also remembered for the popular Scottish romance <i>Kidnapped</i> (1886).
hermetic:	alchemical
cay:	insular bank or reef of coral, sand etc.
Ben Gunn:	a character in Stevenson's <i>Treasure Island</i> , a marooned pirate who helps Jim and Squire Trelawney secure the treasure
beachcomber:	white man in the Pacific islands who lives by collecting goods thrown over-board from ships
heresy:	opinion contrary to the doctrine of the Christian Church

2.3.3 Analysis

The poem begins with an epigraph from *Robinson Crusoe* in which Crusoe articulates his feeling of alienation from the world. He experiences a disconnection

from it which he says might be comparable to what one experiences “hereafter,” after death when one looks upon the transient world. It is the same feeling which is expressed by the poet in the first few lines. Keep in mind that the poem is from Walcott’s 1965 collection *The Castaway and Other Poems*. A comment made by Walcott explaining how he came to write the title poem of this collection is of relevance to “Crusoe’s Journal” as well. He says he wrote “The Castaway” at a beach house in Trinidad where the “beaches . . . are generally very empty - just you, the sea and the vegetation around you.” At that beach house, he conceived “an image of the West Indian artist as someone who was in a shipwrecked position” (Hirsch qtd. in Terada 158). This poem begins by mentioning a beach house located between the ocean and the forest. The image of the artist as situated between worlds is continued when the Crusoe-artist is shown as fashioning “a prose as odorous as raw wood.” The craft of the carpenter and artist are brought together in the use of the word “timber,” which literally means wood but has the same pronunciation as ‘timbre,’ denoting the characteristic quality of sounds. The word “green” repeated twice in the first stanza indicates both the uncorrupted Edenic vitality of the island where Crusoe was shipwrecked and also the fresh, unclipped language he uses, “one without metaphors.” Three figures are brought together in this stanza: the literary (Robinson Crusoe), the Biblical/mythological (Adam) and the historical (Christopher Columbus). Linking them is their use of language. Crusoe is the New World Adam who, like the Biblical Adam, names his surroundings. He is also like “Christofer” (Walcott uses the creolized version of his name) inasmuch as he attempts to Christianize his servant Friday, the “converted cannibal.” The Biblical echoes in the last line of the stanza are skillfully woven in: “Word” is the word of God as well as language in general; the savage sprinkled with water is baptized but sprinkling with a few drops of water can also mean granting a limited knowledge of the language; “good Fridays” indicates obedient servants but it is also the Friday before Easter commemorating the crucifixion; and finally towards the end Christianity is presented as a cannibalistic religion as the phrase “eat the flesh” indicates. The varied aspects of Crusoe’s personality - he is at once a castaway, a discoverer, a coloniser, a linguist and a missionary - delineated by the poet in the previous stanza make him Protean. It is this ability to assume various shapes, almost like a god, which is so fascinating to the poet in his childhood. A child’s fascination with literary characters and situations is concretised in the middle of the poem by mentioning the names of famous nineteenth century writers of adventure tales for children. Henty, Marryat and Stevenson all wrote works which have become classics of children’s literature. That the poet is remembering the incidents read in his childhood is stylistically indicated through the use of parentheses. The sense of awe and wonder at “savage settlement[s]” and “crouched crocodile canoes” is evident in the obvious alliteration, that it is also bracketed off makes it a long forgotten sensation. The boy standing at the edge of the sea is a mental image of childhood, the words “what he cried is lost” indicate that it is an incomplete image. It is a Wordsworthian reminiscence specially in terms of the contrast set up between the “stuttering” past and the “serene” present. And this serenity is not an unmixed blessing for since his boyhood days there has been a multiplication of the poet’s loneliness. Notice once more how the poetic persona and his Crusoe mask came together in the phrase “natural loneliness” which indicates that alienation is both inherent as well as circumstantial, as in the case of Crusoe when nature, in a sense, conspired to his being the lone survivor of a shipwreck.

This conjunction is continued in the last stanza of the poem where the poet’s craft of shaping poetry from the clay of language is called “hermetic.” The word carries associations of magic as well as insularity. The image of shaping vessels from clay is carried over from the first stanza where “earthen, water-bearing vessel[s]” are mentioned. Thinking back on *Robinson Crusoe* I am reminded of the incident in it when Crusoe tries to make vessels from clay, first unsuccessfully and then later, by accident, successfully. Again relating the poetic craft to that of the humble potter the poet labels it as “something without use.” In him the desire for isolation contends with an opposing need for recognition, “another’s praise.” Ben Gunn, the pirate who was deserted by his crew in Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, is an apt figure for

concretising these paradoxical desires. The dangers of isolation are pointed out through the phrase “half-cracked.” While solitude and “peace” is essential for creativity, too much of it can lead to mental imbalance. The appropriation of Crusoe’s language by Friday, the savage, leads to the shaping of the “language of a race.” Crusoe’s journal, the repository of the script, is the main source of the language the colonised take over and make their own. It is also suggested that Crusoe is just a personification of man’s desire for self-dramatization, a boyhood or adolescent fantasy untenable in the real world. In contrast to the questioning faith of childhood, adult life is marked with alienation so that it (alienation) is seen as a part of all God’s creations. The transference of a personal experience to all of God’s creatures is a “heresy” the poetic persona is acutely conscious of.

2.3.4 Mimicry

Now that I have analysed the poem I want you to notice its structure and to make interrelations between its form and content. Notice that each of the three stanzas consists of long lines alternating with short lines. Each stanza comprises one long sentence with clauses and the end of the sentence also marks the end of the stanza. The first and last stanzas posit the person’s identification with both Crusoe and Friday, whereas the second consists of boyhood reminiscences. Walcott’s poetics of affiliation make him identify the poetic persona with both the coloniser and the colonised, Crusoe and Friday. This probably explains the alternation of long and short lines, Friday “learns to shape” the language so that presumably the structure of the poem visually enacts this learning process indicated by the shorter lines. But do not forget that the shorter lines are enclosed within the longer sentence comprising the stanza, suggesting, in my view, that if Friday learns from Crusoe, the latter’s language too is inflected with the former’s. The poet envies the “raw, mimetic cries” of the gulls on the beach, the word “mimetic” should alert you to the fact that from one perspective Friday’s language of the race, which is also the poet’s, can be dismissed as colonial mimicry. Walcott counters this idea in his essay “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?” by writing: “When language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes” (7). Go back to the lines in which the poet hears the gulls and you will notice that there is a longing for mimesis expressed there. As Terada has pointed out mimicry is a survival and evolutionary technique and hence has anthropologically positive connotations (23). Walcott’s most thorough debunking of the notions of originality and mimicry occurs in his play *Pantomime* (1978) where the black servant Jackson Phillip and his white master Harry Trewe each play the role of both Friday and Crusoe. By underscoring the effects of the written word through the mention of adventure novels by Henty, Marryat, Stevenson and Crusoe’s journal, Walcott reinterprets the binary opposition between speech/writing, original/mimesis. Friday and the poet fashion their language from the written word, hence if they can be accused of mimicry it is not of the original but of something which is itself a representation or mimesis.

2.4 NAMES

2.4.1 A New World and a New Language

The arbitrariness of language in a New World setting is a commonplace in religious, literary and theoretical discourse. I use the phrase “New World” not only in the specific sense of the American continent, as I have done so far, but also to refer to the newly created world mentioned in Genesis and its literary elucidation in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667). *Genesis* begins with an account of the Creation of the world and man. Chapter 2 v.19 describes how God leaves it to Adam to name the birds and the beasts: “and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” You can see for yourself that no reason is given for assigning a particular name to a particular creature, the whimsicality of Adam seems to underlie the

important task of nomenclature which can be said to be the first step towards the development of language. Adam's first words are nouns but the *Genesis* does not specify whether these bear resemblance to the creatures or objects they denote. Milton gives an account of Creation as narrated to Adam by the angel Raphael in Book VII of *Paradise Lost*. Raphael lists the beasts, birds and insects created by God and then tells Adam: "thou the Natures know'st, and gav'st them Names." The link between nomenclature and the object to be named is clearly not arbitrary here, the nouns have a basis in the "Natures" or attributes of the creatures. Observe how a new world necessitates the invention of a new language but that the connection between the two parts of a linguistic sign - the 'signifier' (a spoken or written mark) and the 'signified' (what is thought when the mark is made) - may not be either apparent or present. The problem is intensified when both the world and the language is new as was the case with all those who arrived to the Caribbean under the system of slavery or near-forced labour like the Africans and later the Indians and the Chinese. The Crusoe and Caliban paradigms cannot be rigorously applied here because out of language and world, both figures possess one familiar entity. Crusoe found himself in a new world but had his language to express its reality, Caliban experienced imposition of a new language but his surroundings were familiar to him. As far as Africans being brought to the New World are concerned, both language and surroundings were alien and hence it was inevitable that they could perceive no connection between the signifier and the signified. It is the disorientation resulting from this which Walcott highlights in this poem.

2.4.2 The Text

Names

[for Edward Brathwaite]

I

My race began as the sea began,
with no nouns, and with no horizon,
with pebbles under my tongue,
with a different fix on the stars.

But now my race is here,
in the sad oil of Levantine eyes,
in the flags of the Indian fields.

I began with no memory,
I began with no future,
but I looked for that moment
when the mind was halved by a horizon.

I have never found that moment
when the mind was halved by a horizon—
for the goldsmith from Benares,
the stonecutter from Canton,
as a fishline sinks, the horizon
sinks in the memory.

Have we melted into a mirror,
leaving our souls behind?
The goldsmith from Benares,
the stonecutter from Canton,
the bronzesmith from Benin.

A sea-eagle screams from the rock,
and my race began like the osprey
with that cry

that terrible vowel
that I!
Behind us all the sky folded,
as history folds over a fishline,
and the foam foreclosed
with nothing in our hands

but this stick
to trace our names on the sand
which the sea erased again, to our indifference.

II

And when they named these bays
bays,
was it nostalgia or irony?

In the uncombed forest,
in uncultivated grass
where was there elegance
except in their mockery?

Where were the courts of Castille?
Versailles' colonnades
supplanted by cabbage palms
with Corinthian crests,
belittling diminutives,
then, little Versailles
meant plans for a pigsty,
names for the sour apples
and green grapes
of their exile.

Their memory turned acid
but the names held;
Valencia glows
with the lanterns of oranges,
Mayaro's
charred candelabra of cocoa.
Being men, they could not live
except they first presumed
the right of every thing to be a noun.
The African acquiesced,
repeated, and changed them.

Listen, my children, say:
moubain: the hogplum,
cerise: the wild cherry,
baie-la: the bay,
with the fresh green voices
they were once themselves
in the way the wind bends
our natural inflections.

These palms are greater than Versailles,
for no man made them,
their fallen columns greater than Castille,
no man unmade them
except the worm, who has no helmet,
but was always the emperor,

and children, look at these stars
over Valencia's forest!

Derek Walcott-I

Not Orion,
not betelgeuse,
tell me, what do they look like?
Answer, you damned little Arabs!
Sir, fireflies caught in molasses.

Glossary

fix:	position found by astronomical observations
Levantine:	inhabitant of Levant, countries belonging to the Eastern part of Mediterranean like Morocco
Benares:	a holy city on the banks of the Ganges in India
Canton:	a province in China
Benin:	a small West African country
sea-eagle:	a kind of fishing eagle
osprey:	a large bird preying on fish, also called the fishing eagle or sea-hawk
bay:	a bark or howl; part of sea filling a wide mouthed opening of land; kind of wreath worn by conquerors or poets. All three meanings applicable in this context.
Castille:	Spain
Versailles:	a city in France
colonnades:	series of columns
Corinthian:	Greek style of architecture having a bell shaped capital with rows of leaves
cabbage palms:	a lofty palm with a cylindrical trunk and a large crown of fronds
Valencia:	a province of Spain
candelabra:	branched candlestick or lampstand
acquiesced:	agreed
<i>moubain, cerise, baie-la:</i>	French creole words whose English equivalents Walcott provides in the poem
Orion, Betelgeuse:	names of constellations

2.4.3 Analysis

The lack of both a language and a point of cultural origin due to the enslavement of the African people are seen by the poet as negating the linear view of history. In this sense the sea, a seemingly endless expanse of water with no beginning or end in sight, is an apt metaphor for the flux of the non-linearity of history. Behind this idea is Heraclitus's comparison of the flux of time to the flowing of a river. The comparison with the sea is extended and developed in the first few lines of the poem specially with the idea of "pebbles under . . . [the] tongue" and "a different fix on stars." The rocks under the surface of an apparently transparent sea can be compared to coercion underlying the use of colonial languages by the slaves. The nature of perceived reality also suffers an enforced change much like the alteration of the position of the stars depending upon the point from which they are observed. A

drastic alteration effected in both language and reality arose out of the journey across the Middle Passage and culminated in the arrival "here," the Caribbean. The sadness in the eyes of those brought from Morocco or those who came from India attests to the sense of deprivation felt by them. The word "horizon," reiterated continuously in the first part of the poem is the object of search. If taken to mean the point of cultural or historical beginning then the "mind halved by a horizon" would be that of a schizophrenic, one marked by disconnection between thought, feelings and actions. As the goldsmith from Benares or stone-cutter from Canton become accustomed to the colonial servitude, which demands from them not their traditional skills but those of the unskilled labourer, the schizoid tendencies disappear, "the horizon sinks in the memory." When men are looked upon as mere labour it is a degradation of their humanity for they are important only for their physical attributes or mirror image, the soul ceases to be of any consequence. The traditional crafts they were engaged in (that of the goldsmith, stonecutter and bronzesmith) required a spiritual as well as physical effort, but only the latter is demanded of them in the New World. The language corresponding to such a situation can only be one of anguish, a scream or a cry. The nature-culture opposition is emphasised and resolved in the beginning of language with the cry of a bird. Language does not refer to the reality outside, its only referent is the individual, "that I," whose anguish it reflects. Correspondences between the sea and history which Walcott explicates movingly in a later poem "The Sea is History" are anticipated in the concluding lines of the first section of "Names." Dispossession leaves the poet's race with "nothing in . . . [their] hands," the historical erasure of their suffering is here emblematised as the sea erasing the names on the sand. This image has its literary antecedents in Spenser's *Amoretti*: "I wrote her name upon the strand," where it is used to depict the evanescence of love and beauty. The difference in the context of the usage serves to highlight the irony inherent in its use.

After having outlined the historical imperatives Walcott turns to linguistic ones. The second part of the poem begins with a questioning of the interrelationship between the signifier and the signified in the sign "bays," a word which has multiple meanings. The emotion underlying this nomenclature could be "nostalgia" for power and glory which the colonisers tried to re-enact in the New World, if the word is taken to mean the wreath of bay leaves worn by conquerors. But two other meanings of the word - a bark or howl and a part of the sea filling in an opening in the land - could also have been implied in an ironical usage. The howl of the slave and the roar of the sea would testify to the glory of the colonisers at the same time as it would be an ironic reminder to the slaves of their misery. The elegance invested in the language is, according to the poet, not reflective of the surroundings and hence constitutes "mockery." Examples of this mockery include speaking of the New World in terms borrowed from the Old World which carry the grandeur associated with its civilizational accomplishments like art and architecture. Thus the cabbage palms are compared to Versailles' colonnades, for nature provides the architecture of this world. The fronds on the palms are equated with rows of acanthus leaves on corinthian pillars. When the name of a city like Versailles is applied to a pigsty the poet thinks that it is the exiles' revenge for being forced to leave Europe. Walcott is here delineating the factors governing the Europeans' use of language just as he had in the previous section discussed the historical conditions which led to its imposition on others. Most of the white population in the Caribbean is descended from convicts for whom the region was at once a haven as well as exile. Probably this is the reason for their dissatisfaction which the poet indicates by the phrases "sour apples" and "green grapes." The other markers of the world they have left behind, as reflected in the varied means of lighting (lanterns and candelabra), are to be found as oranges and cocoa, much like the colonnades being cabbage palms.

Nouns are the primary markers of identification in the object world and the beginning of language. That the African transformed this language is indicated in the poem by means of what is called "internal translation." The poetic persona in the concluding section of the poem is that of a school-teacher teaching the children nouns, names of

fruits and trees found in the Caribbean. The teacher gives the creole names and then explains them by their English equivalents. He rejects the received ways of pronunciation when he asks the children to utter the names “with fresh green voices” and “our natural inflections.” In my introduction to Walcott’s poetry at the beginning of this unit I had referred to Walcott’s idea of the “tribal accent,” the teacher is here asking the students to speak the language with their own and not received notions of the tribal accent. The pronunciation is one of the ways in which Africans “changed” the language imposed on them. A direct correlation is established between language and reality, culture and nature. Whereas the Europeans value their linguistic and cultural supremacy, the Caribbean school teacher in the poem overturns the hierarchy which places culture above nature to say that “These palms are *greater* than Versailles,” “their fallen columns *greater* than Castille” (emphasis added). The superiority of nature’s handiwork is proved by the “worm,” signifying the destructibility of all objects. Towards the end of the poem he asks the children to describe the stars, forbidding them to use the names given to constellations. The children’s answer that the stars look like “fireflies caught in molasses” is a perfect example of the correspondence between language and nature which the teacher had sought to establish. Molasses is made from sugarcane which along with bananas is one of the principal crops of the Caribbean. The sticky, sweet molasses often attract insects like fireflies. The descriptions draws on the Caribbean reality and hence constitutes a re-naming of the constellations.

2.4.4 *Nommo*

The poem I have just analysed is divided into two parts. To make further discussion on it comprehensible I will call these parts “historical” and “linguistic.” The cultural critic who has most comprehensively explored the connections between history and language in the Caribbean is Edward Brathwaite to whom Walcott dedicates this poem. In *Contradictory Omens* (1974) Brathwaite wrote about the repressive conditions making up the history of the Afro-Caribbeans. From within an oppressive system these people “have been able to survive, adapt, recreate . . . and begin to offer to return some of this experience and vision.” Re-naming is one of the modes of adaptation and recreation in which language is made to correspond to perceived reality. Brathwaite has further explicated this concept as that of the *nommo* which means the word or name, held to contain secret power. As he says, “[the] way of using the word depends very much upon an understanding of the folk tradition out of which it comes” (*Roots* 241). In this context the folk tradition is the creolization of language and Walcott has foregrounded this by giving, in the first part of the poem, the historical background to linguistic and cultural creolization, a method Brathwaite followed in his pathbreaking *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* (1970). One interesting feature of the poem is the shift in the person and number of the pronouns used. The poem begins with the use of the first person possessive pronoun “My race” and then moves to the first person singular “I”, then the plural “we,” which is continued in the “our” with which the first section ends. The poet claims both to speak of his race and for it. In the second part the third person plural pronoun “they” is used for the Europeans, towards the end there is a return to the first person form of address. Terada is of the opinion that this echoes the poem’s theme but she does not provide a convincing explanation of this (98). In my opinion the multiplicity of pronouns used attests to the different persona the poet adopts in the poem: a poet (who gives poetic form to African history); a member of the African race; a member of the various Asian communities (Indian, Chinese); a commentator on the linguistic excesses of the Europeans; and finally a school teacher teaching students the correct approach to language. These are all “names” which can be given to a persona who in himself embodies all the different races who have contributed to the linguistic hybridity of the Caribbean. Finally the poem is a tribute to Brathwaite, who through his writings has done the most to have this hybridity recognised as “nation language” and not dismissed as dialect or patois.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Walcott spent his childhood and some part of his adult life in St. Lucia where he received a “sound colonial education” familiarising him with Western culture. This explains the commonly found references to Western art, culture and literature in his work. But that the Caribbean reality is also deeply impressed on his creative imagination is indicated by his view of nature as constituting the history and civilization of these islands. This is briefly touched upon in his poem “Names” but elaborated fully in “The Sea is History”:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea, the sea
has locked them up. The sea is History. (CP 364)

Refusing to adopt a stand of “recrimination and despair” or one of “remorse” towards history he prefers “a truly tough aesthetic of the New World [which] neither explains nor forgives history” (“MH” 39). This is apparent in poems like “Crusoe’s Journal” where the poet aligns himself both with Crusoe the coloniser and Friday the colonised. Reworking canonical literary characters like Crusoe for a specifically post-colonial agenda on the language politics in the Caribbean is a technique used quite often in Walcott’s early poetry. The multilingual heritage of the Caribbean and its multicultural society are reflected in Walcott’s poetry not only through the different poetic persons but also in poems like “The Saddhu of couva” and “Nights in the Gardens of Port of Spain.” The enforced migrations of people which gave this society its multicultural identity is remembered in “A Far Cry From Africa,” and the plantation system which was sustained by it in “Ruins of a Great House.” In the latter poem Walcott’s stand on history outlined in “The Muse of History” is presented in poetic idiom:

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 . . . (CP 20)

While this stand can be read as pacifist and liberal humanist I hope to show in the next unit that this would be a ridiculously simplistic view of Walcott’s poetic ideology.

2.6 QUESTIONS

- Q1. To what end are literary characters re-worked in post-colonial literature? Discuss with detailed reference to one of Walcott’s poems.
- Q2. The structure of Walcott’s poetry reflects the theme. Elaborate on this statement giving examples from two poems.
- Q3. Write a critical account of the relationship between history and language in Walcott’s poetry.

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

Walcott, Derek. *Collected Poems, 1948-1984*. New York: Noonday-Farrar, 1986.

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- "The Muse of History." 1974. Extr. in *Critics on Caribbean Literature*. Ed. Edward Baugh. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978. 38-43.
- "What the Twilight Says: An Overture." *Dream on a Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1972. 3-40.

Secondary Material

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UNIT 3 DEREK WALCOTT - II

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 The Traveller
- 3.2 The Spoiler's Return
 - 3.2.1 The Cutting Edge of Satire
 - 3.2.2 The Text
 - 3.2.3 Analysis
 - 3.2.4 Carnival
- 3.3 From *Midsummer*
 - 3.3.1 Poetry as Autobiography
 - 3.3.2 The Text
 - 3.3.3 Analysis
 - 3.3.4 Imagi/nation
- 3.4 From *Omeros*
 - 3.4.1 Cultural Translation
 - 3.4.2 The Text
 - 3.4.3 Analysis
 - 3.4.4 Epic Re-vers[e]ions
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Questions
- 3.7 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to discuss Walcott's poetry published in the 1980s and 1990s. In doing so I shall touch upon various aspects of Caribbean culture and society which Walcott has incorporated to a much greater extent in his later work. The poems to be discussed are from his collections *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981), *Midsummer* (1984) and *Omeros* (1990). It is absolutely essential for you to have read carefully the poems discussed at length in the previous unit and the extracts from other poems. This will help you in noting for yourself the differences between Walcott's early and later poetry.

3.1 THE TRAVELLER

Since the 1970s Walcott has divided his time between the Caribbean and the United States. He has taught at Yale, Columbia, Boston and other universities. The title of his 1981 collection of poetry *The Fortunate Traveller* indicates this movement between two regions and cultures and the poems reflect the diasporic or exilic perspective. In "The Hotel Normandie Pool" he writes, "corruption, censorship and arrogance/make exile seem a happier thought than home" (CP 442). However it is not as if the condition of exile is an unmixed blessing. In interviews Walcott has acknowledged, that contained in the exile's physical separation from the place of origin, is "this physical nostalgia for simple things like warm sea, sun, a certain kind of food" (White 157). Linking the art of poetry to the idea of heaven which posits that we are in exile from a place to which we really belong, Walcott calls poetry "a situation of divine discontent" (White 158). The exile's discontent can take as its reference point both the place of origin as well as the place of present abode. Walcott is aware of the haunting, abiding presence of racism in America. The title poem of his collection *The Arkansas Testament* (1977) explores this issue in detail. Since 1990 Walcott has been teaching creative writing at Boston University. He has called Boston the "toughest city in terms of Black fear" explaining that there is a fear of using Blacks in the theatre of this town. Aware of the problems of both the regions

between which he divides his time, Walcott is, in a sense, like his literary creation Shabine, the “red nigger” from “The Schooner *Flight*” who “had no nation now but the imagination” (CP 350). And yet, paradoxically, “the effort to create a nation as if it were an act of imagination” is present in Walcott’s later poetry along with the distancing which arises out of his status as an exile (White 90).

3.2 THE SPOILER’S RETURN

3.2.1 The Cutting Edge of Satire

Walcott’s engagement with and distancing from the Caribbean is suggested in this poem through the persona of Spoiler, a calypsonian, who has come back from hell to visit Trinidad by special permission of his master Satan. The identification of Spoiler as a calypsonian immediately places him in the satirical tradition for the calypso is a popular satirical song in rhymed verse. Cultural critics locate the calypso’s origin at the time of French settlement of Trinidad in the 18th century as songs sung in praise of a master or beration for his enemies. At the beginning of the twentieth century calypsos sung by masquerade bands became a part of formally organised carnival competitions. The first calypso competition was arranged in 1914. In it the competitors sought to outdo each other in wit and rhyme. Errol Hill who has researched the form and function of the calypso in his book on the Trinidad carnival calls it “an instrument of social criticism” and “an escape measure for resentful public feelings.” He has also pointed out that one of the earliest surviving calypsoes in the English language is levelled at a 19th century British governor Sir Hubert Jermingham. Spoiler’s criticism of opportunist politicians, profiteers and bureaucrats is in keeping with this satirical tradition.

The other satirical tradition invoked in the poem is Western. Spoiler asks the Roman satirists Juvenal and Martial to “back me up.” These satirists worked in the epigrammatic style which in its pithiness is quite similar to the succinctness of calypso couplets. Their evocation of Roman life, criticism of fortune-hunters, gluttons, drunkards, debauchers and sympathy for the poor is comparable to Spoiler’s picture of contemporary Trinidad. He also places himself in the line of English satirists from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Rochester, Dryden, Pope, Swift, Byron whom he labels “lords of irony” are visualised as contenders in Satan’s “tent.” The allusion is to calypso tents during carnival where competitions were held and in which a small fee was charged for admission. Walcott brings together the Trinidadian and Western forms of satire by making the Roman and English satirists competitors in a calypso tent. I want to bring to your attention the fact that there are two forms of satire mentioned in the poem: the calypso which as an expression of popular culture can be called a part of ‘the little tradition,’ and literary satire which can be seen as comprising ‘the great tradition.’ Such a hierarchical division would entail denigrating the calypso, which is primarily oral, below the Western mode of satire as literature. Spoiler’s and Walcott’s attack on contemporary Trinidad is double edged in its use of both oral and literary resources. This enables the poem, which is after all in print, to be seen as “orature,” literature inscribed with orality.

3.2.2 The Text

The Spoiler's return

[for Earl Lovelace]

I sit high on this bridge in Laventille,
 watching that city where I left no will
 but my own conscience and rum-eaten wit,
 and limers passing see me where I sit,
 ghost in brown gabardine, bones in a sack,

and bawl: "Ay, Spoiler, boy! When you come back?"
and those who bold don't feel they out of place
to peel my limeskin back, and see a face
with eyes as cold as a dead macajuel,
and if they still can talk, I answer: "Hell."
I have a room there where I keep a crown,
and Satan send me to check out this town.
Down there, that Hot Boy have a stereo
where, whole day, he does blast my caiso;
I beg him two weeks' leave and he send me
back up, not as no bedbug or no flea,
but in this limeskin hag and floccy suit, '
to sing what I did always sing: the truth.
Tell Desperadoes when you reach the hill,
I decompose, but I composing still:

*I going to bite them young ladies, partner,
like a hot dog or a hamburger
and if you thin, don't be in a fright
is only big fat women I going to bite.*

The shark, racing the shadow of the shark
across clear coral rocks, does make them dark--
that is my premonition of the scene
of what passing over this Caribbean.
Is crab climbing crab-back, in a crab-quarrel
and going round and round in the same barrel,
is sharks with shirt-jacs, sharks with well-pressed fins,
ripping we small-fry off with razor grins;
nothing ain't change but colour and attire,
so back me up, Old Brigade of Satire,
back me up, Martial, Juvenal, and Pope
(to hang theirself I giving plenty rope),
join Spoiler' chorus, sing the song with me,
Laord Rochester, who praised the nimble flea:

*Were I, who to my cost already am
One of those strange, prodigious creatures, Man,
A spirit free, to choose for my own share,
What case of flesh and blood I pleased to wear,
I hope when I die, after burial,
To come back as an insect or animal.*

I see these islands and I feel to bawl,
"area of darkness" with V.S. Nightfall.

Lock off your tears, you casting pearls of grief
on a duck's back a waxen dasheen leaf,
the slime crab's carapace is waterproof
and those with hearing aids turn off the truth,
and their dark glasses let you criticize
your own presumptuous image in their eyes.
Behind dark glasses is just hollow skull.
and black still poor. though black is beautiful.
So, crown and mitre me Bedbug the First--
the gift of mockery with which I'm cursed
is just a insect biting Fame behind,
a vermin swimming in a glass of wine,

that, dipped out with a finger, bound to bite
 its saving host, ungrateful parasite,
 whose sting, between the cleft arse and its seat,
 reminds Authority man is just meat,
 a moralist as mordant as the louse
 that the good husband brings from the whorehouse
 the flea whose itch to make all Power wince,
 will crash a fete, even at his life's expense,
 and these pile up in lime pits by the heap,
 daily; that our deliverers may sleep.

All those who promise free and just debate,
 then blow up radicals to save the state,
 who allow, in democracy's defence,
 a parliament of spiked heads on a fence,
 all you go bawl out, "Spoils, things ain't so bad."

This ain't the Dark Age, is just Trinidad,
 is human nature, Spoiler, after all,
 it ain't big genocide, is just bohbohl;
 safe and conservative, 'fraid to take side,
 they say that Rodney commit suicide,
 is the same voices that, in the slave ship,
 smile at their brothers, "Boy, is just the whip,"
 I free and easy, you see me have chain?

A little censorship can't cause no pain,
 a little graft can't rot the human mind,
 what sweet in goat-mouth sour in his behind.
 So I sing with Attila, I sing with Commander,
 what right in Guyana, right in Uganda.
 The time could come, it can't be very long,
 when they will jail calypso for picong,
 for first comes television, then the press,
 all in the name of Civic Righteousness;
 it has been done before, all Power has
 made the sky shit and maggots of the stars,
 over these Romans lying on their backs,
 the hookers swaying their enormous sacks,
 until all language stinks, and the truth lies,
 a mass for maggots and a fete for flies;
 and, for a spineless thing, rumour can twist
 into a style the local journalist---
 as bland as a green coconut, his manner
 routinely tart, his sources the Savannah
 and all pretensions to a native art
 reduced to giggles at the coconut cart,
 where heads with reputations, in one slice ,
 are brought to earth, when they ain't eating nice;
 and as for local Art, so it does go,
 the audience have more talent than the show.

Is Carnival, straight Carnival that's all,
 the beat is base, the melody bohbohl,
 all Port of Spain is a twelve-thirty show.
 some playing Kejak, some Fidel Castro,
 some Rastamen, but, with or without locks,
 to Spoiler is the same old khaki socks,
 all Frederick Street stinkiiing like a closed drain,

Hell is a city much like Port of Spain,
 what the rain rots, the sun ripens some more,
 all in the due process and within the law,

as, like a sailor on a spending spree,
we blow our oil-bloated economy
on projects from here to eternity,
and Lord, the sunlit streets break Spoiler's heart,
to have natural gas and not to give a fart,
to see them line up, pitch-oil tin in hand:
each independent, oil-forsaken island,
like jeering at some scrunter with the blues,
while you lend him some need-a-half-sole shoes,
some begging bold as brass, some coming meeker,
but from Jamaica to poor Dominica
we make them know they begging, every loan
we send them is like blood squeezed out of stone,
and giving gives us back the right to laugh
that we couldn't see we own black people starve,
and, more we give, more we congratulate
we-self on our own self-sufficient state.
In all them project, all them Five-Year Plan,
what happen to the Brotherhood of Man?
Around the time I dead it wasn't so,
we sang the Commonwealth of caiso,
we was in chains, but chains made us unite,
now who have, good for them, and who blight, blight;
my bread is bitterness, my wine is gall,
my chorus is the same: "I want to fall."
Oh, wheel of industry, check out your cogs!
Between the knee-high trash and khaki dogs
Arnold's Phoenician trader reach this far,
selling you half-dead batteries for your car;
the children of Tagore, in funeral shroud,
curry favour and chicken from the crowd;
as for the Creoles, check their house, and look,
you bust your brain before you find a book,
when Spoiler see all this, ain't he must bawl,
"area of darkness," with V.S. Nightfall?
Corbeaux like cardinals line the La Basse
in ecumenical patience while you pass
the Beetham Highway-Guard corruption's stench,
you bald, black justices of the High Bench-
and beyond them the firelit mangrove swamps,
ibises practising for postage stamps,
Lord, let me take a taxi South again
and hear, drumming across Caroni Plain,
the table in the Indian half hour
when twilight fills the mud huts of the poor,
to hear the tattered flags of drying corn
rattle a sky from which all the gods gone,
their bleached flags of distress waving to me
from shacks, adrift like rafts on a green sea,
"Things ain't go change, they ain't go change at all,"
to my old chorus: "Lord, I want to bawl."
The poor still poor, whatever arse they catch.
Look south from Laventille, and you can watch
the torn brown patches of the Central Plain
slowly restitched by needles of the rain,
and the frayed earth, crisscrossed like old bagasse,
spring to a cushiony quilt of emerald grass,
and who does sew and sow and patch the land?
The Indian. And whose villages turn sand?

The fishermen doomed to stitching the huge net
of the torn foam from Point to La Fillette.

Derek Walcott-II

One thing with hell, at least it organize
in soaring circles, when any man dies
he must pass through them first, that is the style,
Jesus was down here for a little while,
cadaverous Dante, big-guts Rabelais,
all of them wave to Spoiler on their way.
Catch us in Satan tent, next carnival:
Lord Rochester, Quevedo, Juvenal,
Maestro, Martial, Pope, Dryden, Swift, Lord Byron,
the lords of irony, the Duke of Iron,
hotly contending for the monarchy
in couplets or the old re-minor key,
all those who gave earth's pompous carnival
fatigue, and groaned "O God, I feel to fall!"
all those whose anger for the poor on earth
made them weep with a laughter beyond mirth,
names wide as oceans when compared with mine
salted my songs, and gave me their high sign.
All you excuse me, Spoiler was in town;
you pass him straight, so now he gone back down.

Glossary

limers:	an idler standing at a public place
gabardine:	a kind of cloth used for making suits
limeskin:	an old felt hat that has lost its shape
macajuel:	a large snake also called a boa - constrictor or anaconda
caiso:	alternative spelling for calypso, a popular satirical song in rhymed verse, often performed by a male singer with body gestures
floccy:	made of wool
Desperadoes:	person of reckless or criminal undertakings
crab-quarrel:	fight with the intention of pulling the other down
shirt-jacs:	loose-fitting, shirt-like garment, worn on official occasions
rip off:	defraud
small-fry:	inconsequential people
Martial:	Roman poet of the first century A.D., especially famous for his work <i>Epigrams</i> which satirize diverse characters of contemporary Rome.
Juvenal:	Second century Roman satirist, author of <i>Satires</i> , characterised by bitter invective and grim epigrams.

Pope:	Alexander Pope (1688-1744), Augustan poet famous for his satires <i>Dunciad</i> on Dullness. <i>Imitations of Horace, Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.</i>
Rochester:	John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1647-80), lyric poet and satirist. One of the first Augustans to write social and literary verse satires. The poem contains a quotation from his "Satyre on Mankind."
"area of darkness,": V.S. Nightfall	V.S. Naipaul wrote a highly controversial novel about India titled <i>An Area of Darkness</i> (1964).
Lock off:	choke back or stop
dasheen:	a large tuber with big, heart-shaped leaves
carapace:	shell
mitre:	Bishop or abbot's tall cap, a symbol of episcopal office
mordant:	caustic or biting
louse, flea:	small parasitic insects
crash a f��t��:	interrupt a party or a public dance
lime pits:	for steeping hides to remove hair
Dark Age:	5th to 10th cent. A.D., the period preceding the Middle Ages was known as the Dark Ages, a period of unenlightenment.
genocide:	deliberate extermination of people
bohbohl:	to steal company or public funds
Rodney:	probably Walter Rodney, a radical Guyanese lecturer and writer whose deportation from Jamaica in 1968 sparked off a massive student demonstration which was taken over by the general public and ended in violent clashes with the police.
goat-mouth:	ability to cause minor misfortune by predicting the future, also called bad mouth
Atilla, Commander:	stage names of famous calypsonians
picong:	spontaneous verbal battle in rhymed song between two or more contending calypsonians
hookers:	small fishing boats
Carnival:	the massive, nationally organised festival of competitive, costumed street-dancing, calypso singing held usually in the last four days before Ash Wednesday.
tart:	sharp, cutting

Rastamen:	members of the Rastafari cult, developed in Jamaica, believing Ethiopia to be the ultimate home of all Black people and the Western society as a survival of the wickedness of Babylon. Characterised by dread-locked hair and ganja smoking, its members reject private property.
Port of Spain:	capital of Trinidad
Fidel Castro:	leader of the Marxist-Leninist government in Cuba
pitch-oil:	kerosene
scrunter:	derogatory term for a person reduced to begging
bold as brass:	defiantly
blight:	cause harm
Phoenician:	inhabitant of Syria
Corbeaux:	carrion crows
cardinals:	leading dignitaries of the Roman Catholic church
ecumenical:	representing the whole of the Christian world
mangrove:	tropical tree or shrub
ibises:	stork-like birds with long, curved bills, found in lakes and swamps
flags:	yellow fibrous shaft
bleached:	whitened by exposure to sunlight
arse:	damned, accursed, a term expressing frustration
bagasse:	dry pith of sugarcane, also indicating the dregs of society
emerald grass:	bright green grass
cadaverous:	corpse-like
Dante:	Dante Alligheri (1265-1321), Italian poet and author of <i>Divinia Commedia</i> comprising the <i>Inferno</i> , the <i>Purgatorio</i> , and the <i>Paradiso</i> .
Rabelais:	Francois Rabelais (1495-1553), French physician, humanist and satirist whose great works are the satirical entertainments on popular giants titled <i>Gargantua</i> and <i>Pentagruel</i> .
Byron:	George Gordon Byron (1788-1824), English poet, dramatist and satirist, author of <i>English Bards and Scotch Reviewers</i> , a satirical poem in which he attacks many of his contemporaries.

Quevedo:

probably Raymond Quevedo who wrote a memoir titled *Attila's Kaiso* (1983), containing an anecdotal history of Trinidad calypso, written in the 1950s by this early practitioner who performed as 'Atilla the Hun' but most likely Francisco Gomez de Quevedo (1580-1645), Spanish poet and prose writer famous for his satires which show the commercialism, racialism, imperialism, slavery in his age.

Dryden:

John Dryden (1631-1700), English poet, dramatist and satirist, wrote a biting satire on his contemporary poet Shadwell in *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) and on the state of the times in *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681).

Swift:

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), attacked contemporary politics, literature, religion, society in satires like *The Battle of Books* and *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

3.2.3 Analysis

Spoiler's return to Laventille and people's surprise at seeing him is the subject of the opening section of this poem. That this place was where Spoiler was famous as a calypsonian is obvious by his own statement that he had left his "conscience" and "rum-eaten wit" here. Indications of the poverty and squalor he lived in are provided by this phrase, which indicates he was a hard drinking man, and the next line in which he is described as a bag of bones. People express their curiosity at his return but some are put off by his ghostly appearance. Spoiler talks about his sojourn in hell where Satan, called "Hot Boy" by him, is a fan of his and listens to his songs on his stereo. Satan's partiality towards Spoiler makes him send the latter back to earth, not as a "bedbug" or a "flea" but as man dressed in a suit and a hat. He hints at the social function performed by the calypsonians, that of singing the "truth." Playing on the word "compose," he sends out a message that even though his physical appearance is subject to decay ("I decompose") his artistic abilities are still intact ("I composing still"). To give evidence of the latter he sings a snatch from one of his compositions about the attractions of women.

Spoiler's meditations on the current political and social situation in the Caribbean bring out the predatory instincts of those in power, whom he calls "sharks." These sharks thrive by exploiting the "small-fry" or ordinary people. The line "crab climbing crab-back, in a crab-quarrel" is wonderfully evocative of people using other people to attain power at somebody else's expense. The marine imagery used in the passage to describe bureaucrats and politicians as sharks and crabs accentuates their influence. If the Caribbean is an area of pristine, Edenic beauty with "clear coral rocks," these people are like ominous dark shadows across it. Spoiler hints that commoners aren't any better off under their chosen representatives than they were under a colonial government. The "colour and attire" of those in power may have changed but the exploitative mentality is still the same. The change in attire is indicated by the word "shirt-jacs," a name for a shirt-like garment which originated in Guyana in 1969 and which is worn for official occasions. For Spoiler the most effective weapon against the current scenario is satire and he invokes satirists like Martial, Juvenal and Pope to aid him in his endeavour. He laments the contemporary situation in the Caribbean and through Rochester's words expresses a pessimistic outlook towards it in his desire to be born as an insect or an animal. This is connected to his previous mention of Satan's kindness in allowing him to be reborn as a man rather than as a lower form of life. It seems as if taking into consideration the present circumstances Spoiler is regretting having come back to earth in human form. Spoiler is aware that his despondency is shared by other artists of the region

particularly the East Indian Caribbean author V.S. Naipaul who has analysed aspects of Caribbean culture and society in his novels and essays. Naipaul's critics have often accused him of presenting too gloomy a picture of the Caribbean in general and of Trinidad in particular. This explains Spoiler's play on Naipaul's name, "V.S. Nightfall" and the evocation of his most pessimistic work to date, *An Area of Darkness*. These two lines serve as a refrain underscoring the bleakness and despondency of Spoiler's vision of the Caribbean and of Trinidad. His realization that his grief is misspent is expressed as self-rebuke. He realizes that his "pearls of grief" are like water off a duck's back. This popular English idiom is made Caribbean by affixing another comparison with it. Spoiler's tears are also like water slipping off the smooth surface of a dasheen leaf. The majority of the populace remains unaffected by what is happening around them, turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to it, insulating themselves against the "truth" which upsets Spoiler. Bewailing the lack of intelligence which makes people of colour objects of aesthetic appreciation without in any way alleviating their material conditions he says, "black still poor, though black is beautiful."

Continuing the insect imagery which had been introduced in the opening section of the poem, Spoiler compares the effect of his mockery to that of an insect bite. The point of comparison is the nuisance value of vermins like bedbugs, fleas and lice. The hypocrisy of those who make pretensions to liberal thoughts and action, and yet persecute others who are willing to effect change root and branch, is a prelude to their violent actions. These are effected to curb the fundamental democratic principle of freedom of expression and justified in the name of "human nature." Extenuation for these actions is provided by contrasting them with heinous historical crimes like genocide. Walcott puts a typical Trinidadian word "bohboh!" in Spoiler's vocabulary to ensure readers' understanding of corruption in Trinidad's economy.

One instance of public apathy to social concerns is the acceptance of restrictions on their freedom. The attitude is one which did not object to slavery in the past and didn't have an understanding of radical ideology like that propagated by Walter Rodney. Spoiler is himself accustomed to censorship but this does not stop him from giving voice to the misfortunes afflicting the country like the well known calypsonians who performed under the names Atilla and Commander. The technique of the calypso is that of "picong," a verbal war which according to Spoiler might soon be outlawed by the authorities. The various ideological state apparatuses like the television and press become vehicles for government propaganda. Complete control over natural resources and even nature itself is expressed in scatological terms. Even language has been corrupted by being used for nefarious means at the hands of unscrupulous journalists. Language is also wielded by the calypsonian but for ends quite different from that of the "local journalist" with his pretensions to a thorough understanding of the artistic and political scenario. The degeneration of the artistic impulse to a market oriented commodity, the hawking of a false idea of the "folk" has become a characteristic of all forms of art including the carnival. The commercialisation of this public celebration has made it another means to hoodwink the locals as well as the tourists. Music and melody are no longer what they previously were. The carnival masquerade consists of people dressed up in various costumes. In these days of role-playing some of the most popular figures people dress up as are Fidel Castro and Rastafarians who embody political justice. But since this ideal is far removed from Trinidadian society Spoiler comments that this is just "playing" or imitation.

Starting from a description of the squalor of Port of Spain, Spoiler extends the scope of this critical gaze to include Trinidad and the Caribbean. The stinking streets of the city make Spoiler call it hellish. The "oil-bloated economy" of the country suffered a serious blow in the eighties when the government found itself unable to call in the loans it had made to other Caribbean territories. Spoiler personifies the small nations of this part of the world as beggars with tins in their hands lining up to receive gratefully whatever meagre aid is doled out to them. The richer nations of the region, like oil-rich Trinidad, congratulate themselves on the charity they bestow to other

smaller regions in the name of black solidarity which couches their materialistic intent. Spoiler says he preferred the unity which resulted out of all the countries being under colonial servitude, "the Commonwealth of caiso," rather than this pseudo alliance of provider and dependents. Such a system has been responsible for the wide gap between the rich and the poor, it has led to the typical feature of a capitalist, consumerist society in which "who have, good for them, and who blight, blight." Bitterness and gall feed the calypsonian's anger, fortified with such nourishment it is no wonder that he expresses a death wish by uttering the words "I want to fall."

The multiracial identity of the Caribbean comprising Creoles and other ethnicities like Syrian and Indian, each community playing an important role in the economy, is evoked by Spoiler. He mentions the different occupations they are engaged in: the Syrian is called a "Phoenician trader" and the Indian is described as an agriculturalist. Both are shown as eager for profit whether monetary or political, it is the Creole who remains illiterate and unambitious. Lest this seem too harsh a depiction Spoiler hastens to add that every community is exploited by corrupt officers of the law. The pastoral scenario of ibises standing in the swamps, flags of corn waving in the fields and the drumming of a tabla across the plain is undercut by the use of phrases like "flags of distress." The Indians are called "children of Tagore" but this ancestry in which they are identified with this nationalist social reformer and man of letters is ironical especially in a scenario where such ideals and accomplishments have ceased to be virtues. Here poor farmers and fishermen work desperately to eke out a meagre living, existence is worse than hell where at least punishment is meted out to sinners according to the severity of the sins committed. The idea of hell as a graduated conical funnel, to the circles of which various categories of sinners are assigned, is from Dante's *Inferno*. Spoiler mentions Jesus, Dante and Rabelais as being in this hellish city for some time and acknowledging his presence by waving to him. I think this probably refers to the carnival masqueraders being influenced by mythology and literature and dressing up or "playing" these parts. The next few lines confirm this interpretation because all those playacting as satirists say they can be seen in "Satan tent" at the next carnival. During carnival the calypsonians contended for the title of calypso king by engaging in verbal wars, sometimes two of them combined forces to sing duets. One of the first duets was sung by Atilla the Hun and Roaring Lion. These contests for supremacy or "monarchy" not only served the purpose of entertainment but also of social criticism. In the last few lines of the poem Spoiler speaks of the calypsonian as the keeper of social conscience and acknowledges the influence of the famous verbal and literary satirists he has just named. The insignificance of this art in the present times is evident in the way Spoiler's return fails to evoke any excitement in the town. It is this which makes him go back "down" to hell. That satire has lost its cutting edge and has become ineffective as a weapon of social criticism is evident from the despondent choral refrain repeated at regular intervals in the poem and the pessimistic ending.

3.2.4 Carnival

The form and function of calypso can be interpreted within Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque outlined in *Rabelais and His World* (1965). Bakhtin read the carnival as part of a thousand year tradition of folk humour. The calypso, an inextricable part of carnival celebrations in Trinidad, has preserved the major types of traditional songs functionally associated with the lives of folk at work, at play, at worship and even in revolt (the insurrectionary songs of slaves). Carnival in Bakhtinian terms "belongs to the borderline sphere between art and life." Comic verbal compositions in it used a variety of genres and styles, both the official and the vernacular. If the calypso is taken as such a composition it can be seen to exhibit these features of mixing high and low vocabulary. Walcott's poem about a calypsonian is itself structured like a calypso, a dramatic monologue in rhymed couplets. Before Walcott, Errol Hill had used this form in his play *Man Better Man* in which the dialogue is entirely in calypso couplets. "The Spoiler's Return" in its intermingling of standard English and localisms in words, phrases and syntax subverts the hierarchy which

undervalues creole. Folk laughter and the ribaldry intrinsic to carnival traditions are present in the few lines of a calypso sung by Spoiler in the opening section of the poem. Grotesque realism associated with bodily functions is also effectively used in phrases like "What sweet in goat-mouth sour in his behind." Both Rabelaisian and Trinidad carnival ambience involves a participation of all sections of society, here the calypsonian is a spokesman for these oppressed masses. The established order is temporarily suspended during carnival celebrations when the utopian ideal and the realistic merge as servants don the garb of their masters who dress in rags. Spoiler's composition and the Trinidad calypso, though part of the temporary suspension of reality, express a wish for an inversion in which freedom of speech, social justice and solidarity becomes the order of the day. Reality, pointed out through satirical means, is never lost sight of, but the possibility of change is an unexpressed hope which is never really abandoned in the calypso.

3.3 FROM *MIDSUMMER*

3.3.1 Poetry as Autobiography

Like *Another Life* (1973), a sequence of lyrics from Walcott's middle period of poetry, *Midsummer* is an exploration of aspects of the poet's intensely personal moments of life. In both collections the influence of the American poet Robert Lowell's much acclaimed *Life Studies* (1959) can be traced. Lowell's work contains poetic and prose recollections of his family, his childhood and his mature experiences of marriage, imprisonment and hospitalization for mental problems. This started the trend for what came to be called "Confessional" poetry in which the revelation of the private universe with all its attendant irrationality became acceptable. Madness, for instance, was a hitherto taboo aspect of private life but in the poetry of Lowell and Sylvia Plath it became a theme for the enunciation of one's identity. Walcott's poetry has its moments of tortured anguish which indicates its links with confessional verse. However since these moments are only one aspect of these two collections I prefer to use the term 'autobiographical poetry' for them. Let me point out some similarities between them. Immediate family members are made the subjects of poetry. Some poems in the early collection are addressed specifically to Walcott's mother while in the later work his first wife and his daughters figure prominently. The memory of his father Warwick Walcott and the paintings he left behind is reworked into poems in both *Another Life* and *Midsummer*. The visual arts, especially in comparison to the verbal art of poetry, is a much discussed theme. To this end *Another Life* alludes principally to Italian Renaissance painters while *Midsummer* refers to Northern painters like Breughel, Durer, Vermeer and in the French tradition to Chardin and Gauguin. The poet's painter friends Harry Simmons and Dunstan St. Omer (called Gregorias) are mentioned as playing a significant role in his artistic development. The future trends this development might take are prefigured in *Midsummer*. In the two untitled sections of this collection chosen for discussion I shall be pointing out these trends.

3.3.2 The Text

FROM *MIDSUMMER*

XXV

The sun has fired my face to terra-cotta.
 It carries the heat from his kiln all through the house.
 But I cherish its wrinkles as much as those on blue water.
 Gnats drill little holes around a saw-toothed cactus,
 a furnace has curled the knives of the oleander,
 and a branch of the logwood blurs with wild characters.
 A stone house waits on the steps. Its white porch blazes.

I tell you a promise brought to me by the surf:
You shall see transparent Helen pass like a candle
flame in sunlight, weightless as woodsmoke that hazes
the sand with no shadow. My palms have been sliced by the twine
of the craft I have pulled at for more than forty years.
My Ionia is the smell of burnt grass, the scorched handle
of a cistern in August squeaking to rusty islands;
the lines I love have all their knots left in.
Through the stunned afternoon, when it's too hot to think
and the muse of this inland ocean still waits for a name,
and from the salt, dark room, the tight horizon line
catches nothing, I wait. Chairs sweat. Paper crumples the floor.
A lizard gasps on the wall. The sea glares like zinc.
Then, in the door light: not Nike loosening her sandal
but a girl slapping sand from her foot, one hand on the frame.

XXVI

Before that thundercloud breaks from its hawsers,
those ropes of rain, a wind makes the sea grapes wince,
and the reef signals its last flash of lime.
Feeling her skin cool, the housemaid August
runs into the yard to pull down clouds, like a laundress,
from the year's meridian, her mouth stuffed with wooden pins.
She's seen these flashes of quartz, she knows it's time
for the guests on the beach to come up to the house,
and, hosing sand from scorched feet, let the hinges rust
in holes for another year. But an iron band
still binds their foreheads: the bathers stand
begging the dark clouds, whose spinnakers race over the dunes,
for one more day. Here, the salt vine dries
as fast as it grows, and before you look, a year's gone
with your shadow. The temperate homilies can't
take root in sand; the cicada can fiddle his tunes
all year, if he likes, to the twig-brown ant.
The cloud passes high like a god staying his powers-
the pocked sand dries, umbrellas reopen like flowers-
but those who measure midsummer by a year's trials
have felt a chill grip an ankle. They put down their books
to count the children crouched over pools, and the idolaters
angling themselves to the god's face, like sundials.

XXVI

Certain things here are quietly American-
that chain-link fence dividing the absent roars
of the beach from the empty ball park, its holes
muttering the word umpire instead of empire;
the grey, metal light where an early pelican
coasts, with its engine off, over the pink fire
of a sea whose surface is as cold as Maine's.
The light warms up the sides of white, eager Cessnas
parked at the airstrip under the freckling hills
of St. Thomas. The sheds, the brown, functional hanger,
are like those of the Occupation in the last war.
The night left a rank smell under the casuarinas,
the villas have fenced-off beaches where the natives walk,
illegal immigrants from unlucky islands
who envy the smallest polyp its right to work.

Here the wetback crab and the mollusc are citizens,
 and the leaves have green cards. Bulldozers jerk
 and gouge out a hill, but we all know that the dust
 is industrial and must be suffered. Soon-
 the sea's corrugations are sheets of zinc
 soldered by the sun's steady acetylene. This
 drizzle that falls now is American rain,
 stitching stars in the sand. My own corpuscles
 are changing as fast. I fear what the migrant envies:
 the starry pattern they make-the flag on the post office-
 the quality of the dirt, the fealty changing under my foot.

Glossary

Midsummer XXV

terra-cotta:	unglazed, brownish-red pottery
kiln:	furnace or oven for firing pottery
gnats:	small, winged insects
oleander:	evergreen shrub
logwood:	a tree found in the Caribbean whose wood is used for dyeing and blossoms for honey
Helen:	in Homer's <i>Iliad</i> the wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta whose free or forced elopement with Paris causes the war between the Greeks and Trojans.
twine:	rope
Ionia:	a region away from mainland Greece where early Greek literature and philosophy were principally developed
cistern:	tank for storing water
line:	piece of cord or rope e.g. fishing line
knots:	intertwining of ropes
Nike:	in Greek religion the female personification of victory, statues depict her with wings

Midsummer XXVII

pelican:	large water bird with pouch in its bill for storing fish
Maine:	a region in New England, U.S.A.
freckling:	light brown coloured
St. Thomas:	small U.S. island in the Caribbean
Occupation:	occupation of France by German forces during the Second World War

Casuarinas:	tree with needle-like, leafless branches
polyp:	simple organism with tube shaped body
mollusc:	soft bodied, hard shelled animals like snails and oysters
green card:	prerequisite for citizenship in the U.S.A.
corrugation:	contract into wrinkles or folds
acetylene:	flame used for soldering
fealty:	a feudal tenant's loyalty to the lord

3.3.3 Analysis

These two numbered sections from *Midsummer* contain detailed descriptions of the landscape and illustrate Walcott's "contribution to the resurrection of 'landscape poetry'" (Jones 37). In an early poem addressed to Edward Thomas (1878-1917), whose work shows a keen observation of English pastoral scenes, Walcott had said "topography delineates its verse." This can just as easily be applied as a general characteristic of Walcott's oeuvre. Dr Johnson has described topographical poetry as "local poetry, of which the fundamental object is some particular landscape . . . with the addition of . . . historical retrospection or incidental meditation." Here topography becomes the point of entry for meditations on the poet's sources of creativity. "XIV" begins by describing the poet's acute consciousness of the process of ageing. The brownish red hue of terra-cotta acquired by firing it in a kiln becomes an image for the poet's aged and weather-beaten appearance. But this is not a source of grief since co-relates for this process can be found in nature: the ripples on the water are like "wrinkles," the pointed leaves of the oleander droop in the sun as sapped of energy as people and a branch of a tree shows signs of decay ("blurs with wild characters").

It appears as if the direction the poet's creativity will take in the future is also delineated by the topography, the waves make a "promise" to him. The mythological figure of Helen is described as the dominant icon of this creativity whose moment of inspiration is fleeting. The evanescence is accentuated by the words "transparent" and "weightless" used for this momentary vision of Helen vouchsafed to the artist. The apprenticeship for this moment has been long and hard, "forty years," for this is the midsummer of the poet's life. Playing on the dual meanings of the word "craft," as an acquired skill and a small boat, Walcott says he has "pulled" or laboured at it. The mention of Ionia, away from mainland Greece, indicates the awareness of the marginality of poetry from this region. Both landscape and seascape are evoked through the words "scorched grass" and "cistern," the unpolished rough hewn quality of the poet's work being a reflection of the "rusty islands" themselves. The pun on the word "lines" which have "knots" in them becomes ironical in the context of critics' valuation of Walcott's poetry as exhibiting a too-finished quality in its form and content. Besides meaning a rope or a cord and a line of poetry, "line" is also used in another sense of a fishing rod which "catches" nothing. The second time it is mentioned it is made into a compound word "horizon line," the horizon catches fire with the blaze of the setting sun, the glow symbolising poetic inspiration which is denied to him in the darkness of his room. The crumpled papers are evidence of the poet's labour at his craft which at certain times, like the moment described here, is uninspired by the muse. The gasp of the lizard and the metallic glare of the sea seem to blame the poet's seemingly futile efforts. Even when the door opens to let in the light it is not the brightness of victory over lack of poetic inspiration, "not Nike loosening her sandal," but a local girl entering the room.

This girl is personified as “the housemaid August” in section XXVI of *Midsummer* which is not discussed in this unit. In the next section XXVII the poet describes in detail the “quietly American” landscape of the island of St. Thomas. The “chain-link fence” which divides the sea from the ball park or the elemental from the civilizational is like the hedge rows dividing the “wild green landscape” from the “pastoral farms” in Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey.” The sense of supervision and control implied by the word “empire” is both contained and extended by “umpire.” Only the rules of the game have altered, since what was once a playground for the empire builders has now become a resort for rich tourists whose means of relaxation here are the sea and sports. The continuation of colonialism as neo-colonialism involves only a slight shift signified by the change effected in empire by replacing the letter e with u. The Americanised way of life is perceived as mechanical, the pelican’s gliding over the sea is like an airplane’s with its “engine off.” In the last few lines the bright glare of sunlight is referred to as the acetylene flame which is soldering the zinc-like rippled surface of the sea. The Americanisation of the landscape is reinforced by comparisons with places like Maine in the New England region of America. Small air crafts used by the tourists for commuting are linked to those used by the Germans for the “Occupation” of France in the Second World War. The imperialistic overtones are hard to miss specially in the lines where developmental work is seen as hazardous to the landscape from which hills are gouged out by bulldozers. The tourism industry and its detrimental impact on the Caribbean is a topic much discussed in literature. Trevor Rhone’s play *Smile Orange* (1971) is a comic elaboration of this theme in contrast to Walcott’s grim presentation of it in this poem.

The affluent class whose members pay for the rights and privileges of living or holidaying on St. Thomas jealously guard the natural surroundings from natives. There is a great disparity between the economies of the various Caribbean islands. Those who migrate from impoverished or “unlucky” islands seek employment in places like St. Thomas, lucky enough to be a part of America. A migrant’s dream of citizenship to the U.S.A., fulfilled on acquiring a green card, is gently satirized by the poet when he says that the leaves on the island have green cards. The aggressiveness of the residents of this place in safeguarding their interests and their indifference to the social inequality is brought out in the poet’s nomenclature of the citizens as “crabs,” ever ready to attack and “molluscs,” who retreat into their shells. The pattern of stars and stripes on the American flag is worked into the poem through the star-like indentation made on the earth when raindrops fall on it. The migrant’s desire for belonging to a more affluent country is called “envy” and distanced from the poet’s “fear” of it. When even the soil seems to lose its Caribbean identity in favour of an American one, the poet’s anxiety, about the psychological changes effected due to the topographical changes involved in migration, becomes understandable.

3.3.4 Imagi/Nation

In making poetry out of his most private experiences, like the difficulties of creative output and his fears of migrancy, Walcott has used a long, expansive verse line. By his own admission it is “reflective, and contains a lot of indirection, and psychology, and self-analysis and connotation” (Walcott, “Thinking Poetry” 186). The free verse pattern with its irregular, unrhymed lines which has been followed in *Midsummer* seems best suited to express the autobiographical, introspective concerns. One facet of this introspection is themes for poetry to be written much later. In “XXVI” it appears to have been prophesied to the poet that he will write about Helen which in turn leads him to think of his Ionia. This prophecy is fulfilled, as it were, in the publication of *Omeros* in 1990 in which Helen is both a stunning negro woman as well as the poet’s island St. Lucia. The creative imagination elucidates a Greek epic with St. Lucia, the nation, as its epistemological context.

This closely approximates to the migrants’ fear of losing touch with the nation as a source of creativity expressed poignantly in “XXVII” as “the fealty changing.” In

"*Midsummer* LIV" there is an attempt to imprint the landscape that "made" the poet. The guilt as well as the necessity of movement to another land is conveyed in the line "the faith that I betrayed, or the faith that betrayed me." I pointed out at the beginning of this unit that from the 1970s Walcott began spending part of every year in America and the other part in the Caribbean. The idea of straddling two cultures and the danger of prioritising the adopted over the native is an anxiety which besets the poet. The concluding lines of "LIV" express this by mentioning Joseph, Jacob's son, who was forced to stay away from his homeland: "Ah Joseph, though no man ever dies in his own country,/ the grateful grass will grow thick from his heart" (CP 510). Nation thus emerges as the basis of identity in Walcott's poetry and imagination as the migrant's only means of reclaiming it.

3.4 FROM *OMEROS*

3.4.1 Cultural Translation

In relocating characters from Homer's epic into a Caribbean setting Walcott effects a cultural translation which can be compared to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In his seminal essay on this topic Homi Bhabha uses translation as a metaphor, a rhetorical figure describing the "increasing internationalisation of cultural production." The performative terms of cultural engagement, the introduction of other incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition is seen by Bhabha as an act of cultural translation. He insists on the canonising and sacralizing of the "transparent assumptions of this translation attempted from a migrant, hybrid perspective. I have shown how this is true of re-versions of canonical texts like *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest*. Based on Walcott's statements I think this can partially explain the author's agenda in re-writing the Homeric epic in *Omeros*. The author's views on literature, like his pronouncements on history, have come under attack in recent times when post-colonial writers are expected to "write back" with a vengeance. He has often commented on the similarities between Mediterranean and Caribbean cultures, the most obvious reason for this being that both regions are characterised by their proximity to the sea. He does, however, take issue with those who question his claim to the idea of Greece but accept unquestioningly Joyce's right to it because of a shared European-ness:

As West Indians, we are closer in temperament to the Greeks than they are. . . . If I think of the classic in the Caribbean, I think of modern. I think of the freshness of Homer. I don't think of the antiquity of Homer. I think of the immediacy of Homer. So if I feel this, yes: I understand islands, I understand sails, I understand wind, and I understand the weather. I understand that. I understand what he felt. It's not that I'm trying to be Homeric. I am on an island in an inland ocean, so the correspondence leaps centuries . . . (Walcott, "Interview" 291).

Look closely at the above quotation, the word "understand" is reiterated no less than five times. So it would not be accurate to say that Walcott's cultural translation of the Homeric epic is merely an attempt to appropriate and subvert the dominant literary tropes of a canonical Western work. Rather it can be seen as setting up "correspondences" between two cultures and their literatures. Walcott has often expressed his view about the cultural peripherality of the Greeks: "the Greeks were the niggers of the Mediterranean" (Walcott, "Thinking Poetry" 183). In the context of this it becomes important to see the relations and affiliations between the works and only then turn to the appropriations and subversions. In an essay on the wound trope in *Omeros* John Ramazani has stressed these very "interethnic connection[s]". The conclusion of this essay provides a qualification to postcolonial theory which sets up an opposition between the margin and the centre with its attendant idea of the

victim and the victimiser, "Appropriating a Western icon of suffering and refashioning a polysemous and multiparented trope, Walcott's *Omeros*, together with the poetry of Goodison, Brathwaite, p'Bitek, and Ramanujan, champions a post colonial poetics of affliction that obliterates the distinction between "victim's literature" and its supposed opposite" (Ramazani 415).

3.4.2 The Text

From *Omeros*

III

"O-meros," she laughed, "That's what we call him in Greek,"
stroking the small bust with its boxer's broken nose,
and I thought of Seven Seas sitting near the reek

of drying fishnets, listening to the shallows' noise.
I said: "Homer and Virg are New England farmers,
and the winged horse guards their gas-station, you're right."

I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as
cold as its marble, then the shoulders in winter light
in the studio attic. I said, "Omeros."

And *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, mer was
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
os, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.
Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes
that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed.

The name stayed in my mouth. I saw how light was webbed
on her Asian cheeks, defined her eyes with a black
almond's outline, as Antigone turned and said:

"I'm tired of America, its's time for me to go back
to Greece. I miss my islands." I write, it returns-
the way she turned and shook out the black gust of hair.

I saw how the surf printed its lace in patterns
on the shore of her neck, then the lowering shallows
of silk swirled at her ankles, like surf without noise,
and felt that another cold bust, not hers, but yours
saw this with stone almonds for eyes, its broken nose
turning away, as the rustling silk agrees.

But if it could read between the lines of her floor
like a white-hot deck uncaulked by Antillean heat,
to the shadows in its hold, its nostrils might flare

at the stench from manacled ankles, the coffed feet
scraping like leaves, and perhaps the inculpable marble
would have turned its white seeds away, to widen

the bow of its mouth at the horror under her table,
from the lyre of her armchair draped with its white chiton,
to do what the past always does: suffer, and stare.

She lay calm as a port, and a cloud covered her
with my shadow; then a prow with painted eyes
slowly emerged from the fragrant rain of black hair.

And I heard a hollow moan exhaled from a vase,
not for kings floundering in lances of rain; the prose
of abrupt fishermen cursing over canoes.

Glossary

Omeros:	Greek name for Homer, author of the epic poems the <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i>
Seven Seas:	the blind seer in <i>Omeros</i> , intended as the St. Lucian analogue of Homer who was said to be blind
shallows:	submerged sandbank
winged horse:	in Greek mythology Pegasus is a winged horse
sibilant:	with a hissing sound
washes:	agitated motion of water as in waves
Antigone:	in Greek mythology one of the four children of Oedipus, the subject of a tragedy by Sophocles in which she disobeys her uncle Creon to bury the body of her brother Polyneices
caulk:	stop up the seams of a ship with oakum and melted pitch
hold:	a cavity in a ship below the deck where cargo is stored
coffled:	train of slaves fastened together
inculpable:	not worthy of blame
seeds:	generations
bow:	fore-end of a ship
lyre:	musical instrument
prow:	projecting front part of a ship
floundering:	move with great difficulty
lances:	long spear used by horsemen

3.4.3 Analysis

This extract from *Omeros* delineates one of those moments in which the author makes his presence felt in the narrative. The narrator's memory of a conversation about Homer, called Omeros in Greek, provides an entry point into the literary and social ancestry. A statue of Homer with a chipped nose reminds him of Seven Seas, the Homeric persona in this work. In a section preceding the one from which this extract has been taken Seven Seas' daily rituals involving homely details like preparation of breakfast, waiting for the sunrise had already been detailed. The conjunction between the marble statue of Homer and Seven Seas had already been made there:

Except for one hand he sat as still as marble with his
egg-white eyes, fingers recounting the past of
another sea, measured by the stroking oars.
(*Omeros* 14)

If *Seven Seas* is a localised Homer it is no wonder that New England farmers are called by the names of epic poets like Homer and Virgil or even that the winged horse becomes the sign for a local gas station or petrol pump. This is in keeping with the use of Homeric names for the St. Lucian villagers who are the "heroes" of this Caribbean epic. So Philoctetes becomes 'Philoctete,' Achilles is named "Achille," and Hector and Achille complete for the attentions of Helen, a local girl who has worked as a housemaid and a waitress.

Homer's statue kept in the "studio attic" of the artist-narrator is invested with a life-like presence. The narrator feels it is "watching," and later senses its "turning away." The utterance of its name "*Omeros*" is linked to the sounds of nature like the "crunch" of dry leaves and the water moving in and out of cavernous openings in rocks. This can be seen as an acknowledgement of the detailed descriptions of various aspects of nature which characterise the Homeric epics. The breaking of the word into its constituents to make it signify natural manifestations invests it with accretions of meaning, much like a neologism. Both the nurturing and the destructive potential of the sea is highlighted through the division of the word and the explanation of its parts. The invocation contained in the letter "O," a feature of epic poetry connoting high classicism, is counterpoised with "Antillean patois" in which "mer" means both mother and sea. French creole, used in interpreting "os" as the grey bone, is posited as having at least equal standing with the language of the classical epics. The crashing of the surf on the shore is onomatopoeically reproduced in the pronunciation of *Omeros*.

Significantly even the woman who uttered the word has a Greek name, Antigone. And yet her appearance is Asian with big almond shaped eyes accentuated by the light filtering through a window in the studio attic. Links between the American islands where the narrator and his work are located and the Greek islands to which both the poet's literary precursor *Omeros* and his muse Antigone belong are made when the latter expresses a wish to go back to her islands in Greece. That this is a memory of events long past is indicated by the phrase "I write, it returns." The image of the woman with black hair, a lacy collar and a swirling silk dress is curiously conjoined with that of a ship sailing upon the seas. The sea waves beating at the ship are like the silk swirling at the ankles forming a picture observed by the all-knowing eyes of Homer who, the narrator says, would be shocked if he could "read between the lines." The narrator taps ancestral memory to revive the horrors of the Middle Passage when slaves were bundled in the hold of the ship like cargo. The caulking of a ship's floor hides its seams, an "uncaulked" surface or unsmoothed reality would not be a very attractive sight. The "Antillean heat" which uncaulks the deck of the ship is the poet's own creativity laying bare the foundations of Caribbean society under the veneer of civilized sophistication symbolized by the "white chiton" covering the armchair. *Omeros* only observes this vision and turns away his head, it is up to the modern *Omeros*, the narrator himself, to interpret the past and put it to creative use in his "craft," the pun linking poetry and ship or by extension the muse of his poetic inspiration who is also the vessel carrying memories underlying his poetry.

The collation of the two is extended towards the end of the extract. The cloud covering the vessel is also the poet consummating his union with the muse (the Asian looking woman with the Greek names) attesting to the varied cultural sources the narrator taps on for the distinctly Caribbean voice he achieves. The "hollow moan" he hears from the vase-like throat of his muse carries within it the suffering of the enslaved Africans as well as the frustration of their descendents, the fishermen,

bending over their canoes in stormy waters. Consciously distancing himself from the epic situations described by Homer in which heroic kings like Odysseus are shown as being caught in tempests at sea, the narrator calls his medium of expression “simple prose” as opposed to the epic verse of Homer.

3.4.4 Epic Re-vers[e]ion

When asked about the metrical form of his epic, Walcott replied that it was “Roughly hexametrical with a terza rima form. It’s like a combination of a Homeric line and a Dantesque design” (“An Interview” 174). The hexameter is the metre of epic and didactic poetry consisting of six metra (a short sequence of syllables). Every line has a caesura or ‘cut’ which means that a word-end occurs regularly within a particular metron. The *terza rima* form consists of a series of interlocking tercets in which the second line of each one rhymes with the first and third lines of the succeeding one. It is Italian in origin and was first successfully used by Dante in *Divinia Commedia*. Ramazani commenting on Walcott’s versification says, “Perhaps the most ambitious English-language poem of the decolonized Third World, Walcott’s *Omeros* fills hundreds of pages with rolling hexameters in terza rima . . .” (406). The word “rolling” in the above comment captures succinctly the sea-like rhythm of the tercets. You must also keep in mind that the author does not strictly adhere to these metrical regulations. Let me give you an example from the passage just analysed:

I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as
cold as marble, then the shoulders in winter light
in the studio attic. I said, “Omeros,”

and O was the conch-shell’s invocation, *mer* was
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
os, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

The rhyme scheme of the two tercets given above is not aba, bcb as demanded by the *terza rima*, it is rather aba, aca. Also the third line being shorter than the others is not hexametrical. Other innovations include ending many of the lines with words containing the “s” sound which reproduces the sound of the sea within the structure of the poem. Even the relatively conventional versification contains strategic re-versions which make them more reflective of the Caribbean ethos evoked in the work.

3.5. LET US SUM UP

By now you should be able to comprehend the differences between Walcott’s work till the seventies and the poetry he wrote in the eighties and nineties. I have analysed three pieces from his later work which are varied in terms of their form and content. “The Spoiler’s Return,” a dramatic monologue, satirically comments on the socio-economic situation in Trinidad. The numbered passages from *Midsummer* are introspections in free verse capturing an exile’s sensibility. The extract from *Omeros* in hexametrical *terza rima* stresses both the literary and social heritage of the narrator, or the poetic persona in the epic. Walcott’s later poetry is characterised by woman as an image of poetic inspiration whether it is the maid in the *Midsummer* passages or Antigone in *Omeros*. In this Walcott adheres to stereotypes of archetypal male representations of women which can be effectively analysed from a feminist perspective.

3.6 QUESTIONS

- Q.1 Examine the impact of popular cultural forms like the calypso on Walcott’s poetry.
- Q.2 Discuss any two innovations in rhyme you find in Walcott’s poems.

Q.3 Analyse the representation of women in “*Midsummer XXVI*” and the extract from *Omeros* given in this unit.

Derek Walcott-II

3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

Walcott, Derek. *Omeros*. 1990. London: Faber and Faber, 1991.

Secondary Material

Walcott, Derek. “An Interview with Derek Walcott.” By J.P. White. 1990. Rpt. in *Conversations with Walcott*. Ed. William Baer. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1996. 151-74.

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Theoretical Material

Bakhtin, Mikhail. “Carnival Ambivalence.” *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. Ed. Pam Morris. London: Edward Arnold, 1994. 194-244.

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UNIT 4 (EDWARD) KAMAU BRATHWAITE-I

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Barbados
- 4.2 Edward Kamau Brathwaite
 - 4.2.1 Poet
 - 4.2.2 Historian
 - 4.2.3 Cultural Commentator
- 4.3 Wings of A Dove
 - 4.3.1 Counterculture
 - 4.3.2 The Text
 - 4.3.3 Analysis
 - 4.3.4 Drum Poetry
- 4.4 Ananse
 - 4.4.1 Folk Imagination
 - 4.4.2 The Text
 - 4.4.3 Analysis
 - 4.4.4 Magical Realism
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are (a) to introduce Edward Kamau Brathwaite as a poet, historian and cultural commentator, (b) to look at his early poetry especially from the trilogy *The Arrivants*. The poems will be discussed in the context of Brathwaite's historical and cultural analysis included in *Roots*, a representative selection comprising essays from the 1950s to the 1980s. For understanding Brathwaite's poetry you must pay special attention to his use of culture-specific concepts from Africa and the Caribbean, his use of nation language and the oral narrative tradition he incorporates in it.

4.1 BARBADOS

Barbados, the island where Brathwaite was born in 1930, is the most easterly of the Caribbean island chain and is located some eighty miles out from that chain, alone in the Atlantic. It had been deserted by indigenous Carib Indians by the time the English arrived in 1625. The first African slaves were brought to it in 1627. Because the island is relatively small and its open terrain allows access to all parts of the country it had been assumed that the slaves were completely engulfed by the dominant European culture and lost all traces of their African past. Brathwaite comments on this assumption in the preface to *Mother Poem*. Barbados is the "most English of West Indian islands but at the same time nearest, as the slaves fly, to Africa. Hence the Protestant Pentecostalism of its language, interleaved with Catholic bells and kumina." Kumina is a ritual ceremony of singing, drumming, dancing and spirit-possession brought over from Africa to the New World by the slaves. Its prevalence attests to the continuance and resilience of African culture in Barbados. Racially the island is one of the most demographically homogeneous territories in the Caribbean, with more than ninety per cent people of African descent and the rest of European or non-African mixed ancestry.

The evolution of Brathwaite's poetic career has often been linked to that of his country. At the time when Brathwaite was growing up Barbados was still an English colony. Brathwaite left for England in the 1950s to study History at Pembroke

College, Cambridge University. He worked in Ghana for eight years and came back to join as Professor of History at the University of West Indies, Jamaica. Apart from his childhood and adolescent years he has never stayed at Barbados for an extended period of time and yet the sense of being a "Bajan," of belonging to Barbados, permeates his work. So it is only appropriate to view the appearance of his first major volume of poetry, *Rights of Passage* (1967), a year after the island's independence, as events reinforcing each other, the poetry marking an independence of language. The first volume of his second trilogy, *Mother Poem*, published in 1977 has been called by the poet as being all about "my mother, Barbados." The landscape of this region-Barbados is a coral island with an underground water supply, filtered through the porous limestone coral rock - is detailed in the opening poem of this collection:

The ancient water sources of my island
echo of river, trickle, worn stone,
the sunken voice of glitter inching its pattern to the sea,

memory of form, fossil, erased beaches high above the eaten
boulders of St. Phillip.
my mother is a pool. (Mother Poem, hereafter M, 3)

A recent collection in which the sense of being a part of and yet apart from his native land is thematised is titled *Barabajan Poems (1492-1992)* (1994). Mixing genres the collection includes poetry, prose, proems (prose poems), the letter, the footnote, autobiography and bibliography. It includes selections of Bajan poetry and hence can also be called an anthology of sorts. But while it is a celebration of Bajan creativity it is also a severe indictment of the recent history of the island which has made it a tourist paradise at the expense of its inhabitants. One instance of this is the connection the poet makes between the building of golf courses, which he calls golf "curses," and the serious drought which has prevailed in Barbados over the past few years (Savory 756).

Despite the growing menace of tourism and increasing Westernisation, the persistence of Afro-Caribbean culture becomes a cause of celebration in this collection. Linkages are made between Barbados and the African Igbo culture and the language used is Bajan dialect or nation language as Brathwaite would prefer to call it. The critical, cultural and historical concerns of the author inform his poetry, the African connection and the control of language are issues he has discussed in various essays over the years. I shall now briefly touch upon the various facets of this creativity and scholarship.

4.2 (EDWARD) KAMAU BRATHWAITE

The 1994 Neustadt Prize Ceremonies, 30 September 1994



Kamau Brathwaite, Djelal Kadir, Walter Neustadt Jr.,



WALTER NEUSTADT JR., AMBASSADOR RUDI WEBSTER, KAMAU BRATHWAITE,
MARY BRATHWAITE MORGAN, WLT BOARD OF VISITORS MEMBER TANIA NORRIS

4.2.1 Poet

Brathwaite's poetic career parallels Walcott's in many respects. Not only are they poets of international repute, both are authors of works which have been called "epics" of Caribbean literature. Brathwaite's epic is titled *The Arrivants: A New Word Trilogy* (1973) and comprises his early collections of poetry interlinked by the trope of a journey which is also the governing idea of Walcott's *Omeros*. He has explained the trilogic form in the dialectical terms of raising an issue, replying to it and trying to create a synthesis:

In other words, the first question, which is in *Rights of Passage*, is: How did we get into the Caribbean? Our people, the black people of the Caribbean - what was the origin of their presence in the Caribbean? And the antitheses to that was - well, the answer to that which emerged was that they came out of migration out of Africa, so that the second movement in the trilogy was the answer to that question. We came out of Africa. Hence, *Masks*. And then, we came out of Africa and went into the New World. Hence, *Islands*.
(Brathwaite "An Interview," 13)

Like Achille in *Omeros*, the poetic persona journeys back to the land of his ancestors: "Exiles from here// to seas/ of bitter edges,// whips of white worlds,/ stains of new// rivers,/ I have returned" (*Arrivants* 153). The trilogy has been seen as providing an "etiology" of Afro-Caribbean experience through a narrative of an African experience originating on the mother continent and extending to the diaspora (Irele 721). Historical, autobiographical and poetic concerns are interwoven in the work. It presents simultaneously a historical account of the New World civilization and its roots in Africa. It is not a literature of despair or recrimination but about the foundation of Caribbean culture in its varied forms be it Rastafarianism, Jazz, Calypso or cult practices like Shango worship. The diasporic experience articulated is that of the author himself who has lived away from Barbados and whose stay in Kenya even resulted in his re-naming from Edward to Kamau.

Much has been written about American and Caribbean influences on Brathwaite's work. Attempts have been made to link his poetry to major American poets like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and Charles Olson. But apart from acknowledging his attraction

for Eliot's "speaking voice," Brathwaite has denied their work as having had an impact on his creativity, "I cannot say I've been influenced by them, I don't know them well enough." In contrast to this he has acknowledged a Caribbean tradition within which his poetry can be placed, "There - if people want to - yes, that's the lineage: Césaire, Brathwaite, Guillen, Damas" (Brathwaite, "An Interview" 25). The most clear correspondences drawn are those between Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* and Brathwaite's *Arrivants*, both starting from local reality to etch the topographical, linguistic and sociological aspects of the Caribbean. Other Negritude poets like Senghor and Damas were available to Brathwaite through anthologies. Manifestations of orality and the importance of music in his work can be said to owe something to them. Brathwaite's efforts in founding and running the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), started by him in London in 1967 along with John La Rose and Andrew Salkey, brought him in touch with Caribbean poets based in Britain. He has read poetry with dub poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mutabaruka and Amiri Baraka. Performing his own poetry was in a way a natural corollary to the oral rhythms in Brathwaite's work. His reading of the *Arrivants* trilogy was issued as a five-disc set in the 1970s under the record label Argo.

4.2.2 Historian

Brathwaite trained as a historian first at Cambridge where he received his Bachelor's degree and then at Sussex where he submitted his Doctoral thesis entitled "The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820." This was published by the Oxford University Press in 1971. In this work he calls creolization a "cultural action" or a "social process" based upon the response of individuals within society to their environment and to each other. The process takes place in stages, starting with the "seasoning" of slaves when they were branded, given new names and put under apprenticeship to already creolized slaves. During this period they learnt the language and the work. This led to their "socialization" which, in cases where the slaves lived in close proximity with their masters, like the household slaves, resulted in imitation. Forms of imitation could be behavioural as well as linguistic in which case the typical West Indian imagination could be characterised by the phrase "The snow was falling in the canefields." Brathwaite criticizes the elite blacks for losing touch with their folk culture and hence losing their chance for independence. An extremely important section of this work is that in which he describes the African orientation of Jamaican folk culture and the continuances and subversive potential of the slaves' rituals and language. This was published separately as *The Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* by New Beacon Books in 1971. In his articles for *Timheri* Brathwaite extended the concept of creolization to a socio-cultural description of the four main culture carriers of the region - Amerindian, European, African and East Indian - and how they interacted with each other. However, even here he stresses the recognition of an ancestral relationship with the folk or aboriginal culture. I shall summarise Brathwaite's cultural commentaries in the next section.

4.2.3. Cultural Commentator

Brathwaite's single most important and most controversial work on Caribbean culture is *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (1974). It was originally presented as a paper at a conference at John Hopkins University. In the introduction he talks of the Caribbean environment needing its own aesthetic, and of being the only delegate to a conference "dripping with the tropical sun." The essay makes statements like Africa is the "submerged mother of the Creole system" which can be questioned on the basis of Brathwaite's own pronouncements about the four different ethnicities together contributing to the creolization of Caribbean culture. Similarly his famous comment on Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* that white Creoles had not suffered enough in the Caribbean to belong is debatable to say the least. However it is the last line of the essay which is often quoted in discussing the Caribbean ethos. "The unity is submarine" is both a poetic statement of the pan-Caribbeanness he advocates as well as a challenge to the

Besides this full length study of Caribbean culture Brathwaite has discussed aspects of it in essays and articles over a span of more than forty years. According to him artists in the West Indies face a "fragmented culture" which has led to a dissociation of sensibility in the early post-colonial literature. As and when consciousness of "rootlessness" has emerged, it has been from an emigrant perspective. Walcott, according to Brathwaite, expresses the pressures and dilemmas of this plural society. One aspect of this pluralism is the existence of subcultures and their impact on other aspects of cultural production like literature. Rastafarianism and the Jazz aesthetic are two such subcultures he discusses with respect to literature especially the West Indian novel. One of Brathwaite's major essay of recent years is "Metaphors of Underdevelopment: A Proem for Hernan Cortez" in which he begins by speaking of "a Bajan labourer" who is caught in "a cultural catastrophe." He explains that by culture he means "the texture and life-style of peoples . . . culture seen as dialectic of motion." Towards the end of the essay he has moved to a position in which cultures are seen as icons of the missile and the target, "just as the symbol of the expansionist is the missile, so the symbol of the subsistence exploited cultures becomes the circle, hole or target" ("Metaphors" 250). Brathwaite's cultural commentaries have, over the past three decades, widened in their focus from a delineation of Jamaican folk customs to a discussion of Caribbean cultural forms and finally encompassing underdeveloped third world nations.

4.3 WINGS OF A DOVE

4.3.1 Counterculture

In the previous unit I briefly explained Rastafarian beliefs. Here I forward the idea of Rastafarianism as a counterculture to the prevailing cultural mores in the Caribbean and particularly Jamaican society, as revealed through the beliefs and the language used by members of this sect. The existence of Rastas on the **margins** of society has been the subject of Caribbean fiction and poetry. Roger Mais's novel *Brother Man* (1954) depicting a Christ like Rastafarian has been analysed by Brathwaite in detail as an epitome of Jazz aesthetic. In the 1970s Orlando Patterson wrote a novel on the same theme titled *Children of Sisyphus* which shows the influence of Mais's work. In poetry the work of Dennis Scott and James Berry has dealt with this figure.

Rastafarianism developed in Jamaica, believed Ethiopia to be the ultimate home of all black people and its emperor, Haile Selassie, to be divine. The word originated from 'ras', 'chief', the title of an Ethiopian lord or prince and 'tafari,' family name of the emperor. The appearance and practices of members of this cult are a marker of their peripheral position. They follow certain Old Testament tenets including refusal to cut the hair and beliefs which include vegetarianism, ganja (opium) smoking and rejection of private property. In keeping with this last tenet they use the word Babylon in its Biblical sense to denote any society characterised by sinful pursuits. Such is the Westernized Jamaican society where people are engaged in dishonest commercial and political dealings. From its beginnings in the nineteen thirties the Rastafarian movement has had a great impact on the people of Jamaica and the Caribbean. Many of its ideas, considered marginal at its inception, have passed into the mainstream and become commonplaces of thought on black power and majority control. This appropriation has been oriented towards a demand for social justice in opposition to hegemonic practices exerted by the state and its apparatuses like the police and the judiciary. The impact of these ideas has been documented by historians like Walter Rodney and cultural critics like Rex Nettleford who see it as an expression of "black consciousness" in the face of a "continuing colonial society" based on suppression and oppression.

The Rastafarian efforts to counter power structures in society include a dismantling of hegemony imposed by structures of language. This is particularly evident in modes of address used for asserting identity. They consciously refer to themselves as "black men" rather than "Negroes," as a reaction to the derogatory use of the latter word since colonial times. In Jamaican creole the first person singular is usually expressed by the pronoun "me", and the plural by "we." To the Rastafarians, however, both "me" and "we" as objects of the sentence are always governed by the subject much like the way in which Europeans governed the slaves. Because the Rastas think the use of "me" points to a subservient attitude on the part of the blacks they insist on the use of "I" for the personal pronoun (Ashcroft 48-49). The letter can also be a homonym with "high" and indicates the spiritually bound human self shared by all believers probably because it is also the last syllable of Ras Tafari. While reading the poem you will notice that Barthwaite has used the counter-language of the Rastas as an inextricable element of his poetic idiom.

4.3.2 The Text

Wings of a Dove

1

Brother Man the Rasta
man, beard full of lichens
brain full of lice
watched the mice
come up through the floor-
boards of his down-
town, shanty-town kitchen,
and smiled. Blessed are the poor
in health, he mumbled,
that they should inherit this
wealth. Blessed are the meek
hearted, he grumbled,
for theirs is this stealth.

Brother Man the Rasta
man, hair full of lichens
head hot as ice
watched the mice
walk into his poor
hole, reached for his peace
and the pipe of his ganja
and smiled how the mice
eyes, hot pumice
pieces, glowed into his room
like ruby, like rhinestone
and suddenly startled like
diamond.

And I
Rastafar-I
in Babylon's boom
town, crazed by the moon
and the peace of this chalice, I
prophet and singer, scourge
of the gutter, guardian
Trench Town, the Dungle and Young's
Town, rise and walk through the now silent
streets of affliction, hawk's eyes
hard with fear, with

affection, and hear my people
cry, my people
shout:

Down down
white
man, con
man, brown
man, down
down full
man, frown-
ing fat
man, that
white black
man that
lives in
the town.

Rise rise
locks-
man, Solo-
man wise
man, rise
rise rise
leh we
laugh
dem, mock
dem, stop
dem, kill
dem an' go
back back
to the black
man lan'
back back
to Af-
rica.

2

Them doan mean it, yuh know,
Them cahn help it
But them clean-face browns in
Babylon town is who I most fear

an'who fears most I.
Watch de vulture dem a-fly-
in', hear de crow a-dem crow
see what them money a-buy?

Caw caw caw caw.
Ol' crow, ol' crow, cruel ol'
ol' crow, that's all them got
To show.

Crow fly flip flop
hip hop
pun de ground; na
feet feel firm

pun de firm stones; na
good pickney born
from de flesh
o' dem bones;

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naw naw naw naw.

3

So beat dem drums
dem, spread

dem wings dem,
watch dem fly

dem, soar dem
high dem,
clear in the glory of the Lord.

Watch dem ship dem
come to town dem

full o' silk dem
full o' food dem

an' dem 'plane', dem
come to groun' dem

full o' flash dem
full o' cash dem

silk dem food dem
shoe dem wine dem

that dem drink dem
an' consume dem

praisin' the glory of the Lord.

So beat dem burn
dem, learn

dem that dem
got dem nothin'

but dem
bright bright baubles

that will burst dem
when the flame dem

from on high dem
raze an' roar dem

an' de poor dem
rise an' rage dem

in de glory of the Lord.

Glossary

Dove:	a bird symbolising peace, particularly appropriate here since the Rastafarian motto is "peace and love."
Brother Man:	a familiar form of address for male members of the Rastafarian cult, also the title of a novel by the Jamaican novelist Roger Mais (1905-1955).
lichens:	a skin disease with reddish eruptions
downtown:	away from the centre of the town
shanty-town:	town consisting of huts, cabins and shacks
pumice:	light porous lava sometimes used as powder for polishing
ganja:	opium
ruby, rhinestone:	precious and semi-precious stones
Babylon:	in the Bible references to Babylon are disguised attacks on Rome seen as the ancient capital of persecution and paganism. The Rastas use the word to refer to any wicked Westernised society.
boomtown:	town flourishing from a period of prosperity or sudden activity in commerce
chalice:	literally goblet or Eucharist cup, here refers to the ganja pipe
scourge:	person regarded as bringer of punishment
Dungle and Young's Town:	Kingston's Dungle in Orlando Patterson's Rastafarian novel <i>Children of Sisyphus</i> (1965), elsewhere described by Brathwaite as a "city smouldering in garbage."
Soloman:	Brathwaite's neologism for the Biblical Solomon, a king famous for his wisdom, combining the senses of the only (solo) wise man and a lonely (solo) man
leh:	to permit, also used in the imperative to imply persuasion or threat
na:	no, especially at the folk level in answering a question
pickney:	young child of Black or East Asian parentage
dem:	used with a noun to indicate a group or a set
Crow:	different from an ordinary crow, used in the sense of a carrion crow who is almost as big as a vulture and feeds on carcasses.
baubles:	showy trinkets

The characteristic Rastafarian term of address with which the poem begins sets the tone for other such conventions used in it. The shabby, unkempt appearance of the Rasta in this poem is not cultivated but all too real. His dilapidated lodgings in a "shanty-town" arise out of his poverty. It is true the members of this sect believe in a rejection of private property but the picture of squalor presented here goes far beyond idealistic beliefs. The mice coming up through his floorboards seem to the Rasta to embody his own situation of weakness of body and spirit. Like them he is tucked away in one corner of the house, stealthily passing his days, enveloped in beliefs born out of convictions or necessity. The only escape possible is derived from smoking ganja. The effect of the drug on him is almost instantaneous, suddenly it seems as if the eyes of the mice shine like diamonds. An ironic juxtaposition of imagined riches and the "poor hole" in which they suddenly appear is made in the second stanza. Here the drug induced hallucination makes the Rasta's "head as hot as ice," the phrase pointing to the illogical and extraordinary sense perceptions experienced in a drugged state. This state provides him with a respite from his poverty and social alienation, albeit a temporary one.

The return to reality is marked by an assertion of selfhood as the reiterated "I" testifies. Amidst the economic prosperity of modern day Jamaica the Rasta feels "crazed" and acknowledges that the drug is what offers him "peace." Smoking of ganja is prohibited by the rules of the wider society but for the Rastas it is a holy and wisdom-giving weed. It endows "Brother Man" with vision, imagination and the courage to step out of his hiding hole into the world outside. Here he notices that if suffering is a fact of existence for people, revolution is not far behind. His piercing hawk-like gaze takes in the toiling masses' cries for social justice which are transcribed in the poem. The socially privileged classes are the whites, the browns who are of mixed Afro-Caribbean and European ancestry and those among the blacks who ape them ("white black man"). Rastas are seen as agents of social amelioration, there is a call for the rise of men with "locks," matted or plaited hair of members of this sect. Not only is the Rasta wise like Solomon in his vision of equality and justice for all, he (Brathwaite insists on "man") is probably the only person who can translate this vision into reality. In "Solo-man," one of his more successful neologisms, Brathwaite has captured at once the wisdom and alienation of this "man." He realizes that satire as a weapon is useless against those who exploit others in "Babylon" hence violence remains the only effective means of counter-attack. Once these people are exterminated a true return to African values becomes possible. The phrase "back to Africa" is significant here because Rastafarianism is sometimes seen as having evolved out of Marcus Garvey's movement which used the same phrase. In it the raising of black consciousness was a prelude to an actual return to Africa.

In the second section of the poem the Rasta expresses the mutual distrust and fear characterising relations between his community and the "cleanfaced browns" who control society at large. Calling them predators by speaking of their meteoric rise as the flight of crows and vultures, he emphasizes the vice like grip ensured by the power of money. You will remember that in Walcott's poem "The Spoiler's Return," Spoiler had spoken of Trinidadian society in almost the same terms. Here Brathwaite reproduces sound effects by incorporating a rendition of the crow's cawing, flying and skipping on the ground: "caw, caw," "flip flop" and "hip hop." These phrases are used to indicate the relentless speechifying and the ubiquitousness of the people who actually control the country's resources. But that they are out of touch with the ground realities and that they pass on their attitudes and prejudices to the next generation constitutes another aspect of the Rasta's indictment. His protest is voiced in the reiteration of the word "naw" which in its strategic alteration of "caw" signifies a countering of the predatory order of things. An aspect of this order is the conspicuous consumption of articles of luxury like silk, shoes and wine listed in the third section of the poem. The tourist culture has contributed to the already sorry

state of affairs. The lure of the tourists' cash proves irresistible for some who use it to fulfil their desire for "bright bright baubles." These people, according to the Rasta, must be taught by violence or by education the insignificance of the things they crave for, suggesting that any affirmative action must be potentially revolutionary to be even remotely effective.

Biblical references and motifs present in the poem as in the phraseology "Blessed are the poor" and in words like "Babylon," "Solomon" and "chalice" gather momentum in the last section where the phrase "the glory of the Lord" is used like a refrain. Even the idea of the "boom-town" being overrun by birds of prey is derived from the book of *Revelation* in the Bible where Babylon's doom is predicted in these words: "Babylon the great is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." The blaze of fire destroying the town is a vision of the apocalypse again showing the influence of Biblical sources as is the idea of the rich being destroyed and the poor rising out of it pure in body and mind. The poem therefore links up social and religious ideas as embodied in Rastafarian principles.

4.3.4 Drum Poetry

"Wings of a Dove" is from the "Rights of Passage" volume of the *Arrivants* trilogy, and first appeared in 1967. The title of the poem is from the first line of a popular ska tune of the early sixties which begins, "If I had the wings of a dove, I would like to fly away and be at rest." The song echoes a line from the *Psalms* and has also been used by Henry James as the title of one of his novels. This song expresses a yearning for escape also articulated by the Rasta in Brathwaite's poem when imagines he has grown wings to fly away (Rohlehr, "Blues" 72). Rohlehr comments that Brathwaite brings us closer to the Rastafarian experience by creating the drum rhythms of the cult (73). The music closely associated with Rastas is reggae in which a heartbeat rhythm is played on a kettledrum as an accompaniment to mournful lyrics on the theme of hardship and protest. The ska tune from which the title derives also has a quick lively 1-2-1-2 drum-beat and is considered the forerunner of reggae. This drum rhythm is present most clearly in the last section of the poem. Speak out the words "silk dem food dem/ shoe dem wine dem" and you will feel that the rhythm underlying them is that of the heartbeat. One of the aspects of nation language which Brathwaite mentions in "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature" is the setting up of "certain tunes, tones and rhythms which are characteristic of the folk tradition" (243). The West African connections of Caribbean vocabulary are present in words like "dem" and the call and response pattern is evoked by "na." The folk theme, rhythm, syntax and vocabulary make this poem a creative exposition of Brathwaite's theoretical formulation "nation language."

4.4 ANANSE

4.4.1 Folk Imagination

Anancy or Ananse as Brathwaite chooses to call him is the cunning trickster hero of a number of Caribbean folktales in which he appears as a mythical spider in a human form. Derived from West African culture especially that of the Akans in Ghana, the folklore associated with this figure is called *Anansem*. By using the African spelling for the name of this figure Brathwaite seems to be highlighting its African origins. This is not surprising considering the author spent eight years in Ghana working with the Ministry of Education. In that country the person who has done the most to popularise Ananse lore is the theatre activist and folklorist Efua Sutherland. In her play *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) and *Anansegoro* (plays based on the Ananse stories) she has sought to make the exploits of this figure contemporary. In the conclusion to the play she observes, "That Ananse is, artistically, a medium for society to criticise itself can be seen in the expression 'Exterminate Ananse, and

society will be ruined.”” The association of Ananse with the power of words (folktales are passed by word of mouth and Ananse usually talks himself out of a tricky situation in them) and the impact of words in changing the course of history is the focus of this poem.

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Significantly Brathwaite aligns Ananse with Legba, regulating deity of communication between humans and gods, patron of metamorphosis, transition, and uncertainty in West African mythology. There is no direct mention of Legba in the poem but frequent references about lameness confirm the presence of this aged, lame, hunch-backed or one-legged god. Ananse is the culture-hero of intelligence and common-sense and hence has the ability to triumph over disabilities. This wit is the gift of Onyame, the Akan Supreme Divinity. Legba is quintessentially located at transition points of time and space. In fusing the two figures the poet is probably seeking the elevation of a folkloric figure to mythical dimensions and hence striving “to rehabilitate the significance of the lowly creature . . . [to] become an icon charged with transformative potential” (Warner-Lewis 59). This also enhances the social relevance of Ananse particularly in the Caribbean which has been the site of transformative disruptions like revolts and rebellions. Brathwaite’s reclamation of Anancy from the African to the Caribbean scenario is in the tradition of folklorists and creative writers like Louise Bennett and Andrew Salkey who have retold the exploits of this trickster as children’s tales. John Figueroa’s rendering aptly sums up this reclamation:

Anancy is a spider;
Anancy is a man;
Anancy’s a West Indian
And West African.

4.4.2 The Text

Ananse

With a black snake’s un-
winking eye
thinking thinking through glass
through quartz

quarries of stony water
with a doll’s liquid gaze, crystal,
his brain green, a green chrysalis
storing leaves,

memories trunked up in a dark attic,
he stumps up the stares
of our windows, he stares, stares
he squats on the tips

of our language
black burr of conundrums
eye corner of ghosts, ancient his-
tories;

he spins drum-
beats, silver skin
webs of sound
through the villages;

I’acky heard him
and L’Overture

all the hung-
ry dumb-bellied chieftains

who spat
their death into the ground:
Goave, Port-au-Prince, Half Moon Fort,
villages,

dead lobster-pot crews,
wire, red sea shells, coconut trees' hulls, nodding skulls,
black iron bells, clogged,
no glamour of noon on the man-

grove shore.
Now the poor hang him up in the ceiling,
their brooms cannot reach his hushed corner
and he sits with the dust, desert's rainfall of soot,
plotting a new fall from heaven

threading
threading
the moon
moonlight stories

his full mouth agape
a black pot
grinning
grinning

round fire that boils in his belly
walloboa wood words,
eyes, fireflies, sparks,
crashing coals' waterfalls,

grey ashes aroused,
old men's ghosts,
cinders,
burnt memories' eyes in the hot hut,

flesh,
curling silver,
revealing their shadows of meaning
as the god stares down,

black beating heart of him breathing
breathing
consuming our wood
and the words of our houses
black iron-eye'd eater, the many-eye'd maker,
creator,
dry stony world-maker, word-breaker,
creator...

In the yard the dog barks at the stranger.

Glossary

quartz: mineral crystallising in the shape of prisms

crystal: clear transparent ice like mineral found in rocks

chrysalis:	form taken by an insect while developing hence preparatory or transition state	Edward Barthwaite-I
stares:	probably a homophone (words identical in sound but not in meaning, origin or spelling) for “stairs”	
conundrums:	riddle with a pun in the answer	
Tacky:	leader of a slave rebellion in Jamaica in 1760-61 involving a dozen plantations in the vicinity of St. Mary’s Parish in which as many as 400 slaves revolted.	
L’Ouverture:	Toussaint L’Ouverture, leader of the Haitian revolution from 1792-1804, see Unit 1	
lobster-pot:	a trap made of wire netting, designed for catching lobsters on the sea-bed	
walloboa wood:	probably wood from the wallaba tree, which is reddish-brown in colour and is widely used for building	

4.4.3 Analysis

Ananse is a frozen, inert presence staring through the “glass” and “quartz,” and yet the potentiality inherent in the figure is highlighted by the repetition of the word “thinking.” This passive state of development is linked to a “chrysalis” which stores leaves in anticipation of growth. Ananse, the culture-hero, is so embedded in the popular imagination that his “reincarnation in the flesh of the living” at opportune moments of history is a distinct possibility (Rohlehr, “Rehumanization” 186). The physical actions of Ananse as spider-man are fused with the verbal dexterity which is his chief characteristic in folk narratives, as is the idea of geographical space with mental space in the formulation “memories trunked up in a dark attic.” An attic, a storing area for old, ancestral possessions with memories associated with them, conjures up an idea of a musty, cobweb-filled place, the common haunt of spiders. Ancestral memory is the favourite source of folktales like the ones in which Ananse figures. Much like the objects in an attic it is always at hand and needs only a little effort to be recalled and given a new form such as the one a chrysalis develops into. The memory evoked here is clearly linked to the African heritage the slaves brought with them to the Caribbean. These are the “ancient histories” of various tribes transported *en masse* from Africa who have kept the African connection alive in language through proverbs, riddles, “conundrums.” Ananse “spins” riddles which contain traces of an ancient way of life resonant with drums beating to convey messages from one village to another. The connection is reinforced with a linkage of Ananse to Legba whom Brathwaite’s notes to *The Arrivants* call “the Dahomean/ Haitian god of the gateway . . . the crucial link between man and the other gods . . .” (273). Ananse’s stumping up the “stares,” (stairs) of the windows and a mention of his “fall from heaven” stresses his relationship with lame deities, be it Legba from Caribbean mythology or Hephaestus from Greek mythology.

The “reincarnation” of Ananse qualities is to be found in the historical figures of Tacky and L’Ouverture whose exploits in popular slave rebellions occupy the popular imagination as much as Ananse lore. Besides them other “chieftains” also set little value on their life and the names of various places given in the poem carry mnemonic associations of other slave revolts. While history may have glamourised these, Brathwaite’s presentation of them is in terms of the human losses suffered about which there is no glamour. Living off the sea for sustenance the “lobster-pot crews” were the first casualties of war, their “nodding skulls” floating on the water,

their lobster traps and fishing vessels made out of coconut trees lying as abandoned as the "black iron bells," remnants of a colonially imposed religion. Intrigue as practised by men like Tacky and L'Ouverture was required for the overthrow of colonial slavery. This is equated with the spider's ability to spin webs which ensnares unsuspecting victims. The "poor," who benefited most from the revolutions, are the keepers of these accounts. Try as they might the future descendants of those emancipated cannot obviate the traces of history: "their brooms cannot reach his hushed corner."

The sustained relevance of Ananse to Caribbean society is in the revolutionary capacity of language. The nets he now weaves are linguistic, the "moonlight stories" are as evocative of ancestral heritage as the "silver skin webs of sound" which were a call to subversive actions. In West African culture traditional story-tellers, *griots*, often narrate stories to a gathering of villagers around a fire. The *griot* is usually considered to be divinely inspired in his narration which transcends the narrative act and becomes the social act of performance. Ananse, the spinner of words brings the community together performing the function of the *griot*. His are "walloboa wood words" describing the Caribbean milieu since the walloboa tree is native to this region. That these words can kindle the latent revolutionary potential is imagistically rendered by an evocation of fire, the symbol of inspiration: "fireflies, sparks,/ crashing coals' waterfalls,/ grey ashes aroused. . . ." I mentioned earlier that Brathwaite has collated the figures of Ananse and Hephaestus, the lame Greek god of fire and of crafts. The images of fire just explained are an extension of this linkage. Like Ananse, Hephaestus is a weaver of sorts, he trapped his unfaithful wife Aphrodite with the god Ares in a net of his own devising. Another similarity between the two is their craftsmanship, with "words" in the former case and with objects in the latter.

The "god" who looks down is also Legba, who enables communication between the human and the non-human worlds. When the Ananse tale is recounted the boundaries between these two dimensions collapse, the magical seems real in the narration of the *griot*. One aspect of this figure was manifested in the rebel leaders who are responsible for the Caribbean as it exists today. Hence Ananse is "world-maker" and "creator" in a typically Caribbean sense. But since battles can be fought on the terrain of language Ananse is an epitome of the folk imagination which is instrumental in providing the working features of a language. So he is also a "word-breaker" since the transformation effected in an imposed language is through these features. The scenario of the *griot* narrating stories to the villagers gathered around a fire, which had been bracketed off by the poet's discussion of Ananse's multifacetedness, is evoked in the concluding line of the poem. The dog barking at the "stranger" interrupts the telling of the tale, just as the arrival of colonising "strangers" had disrupted the African culture to which Ananse originally belongs.

4.4.4 Magical Realism

Commenting on *Islands*, the third book of his *Arrivants* trilogy from which this poem is taken, Brathwaite draws attention to it being much more fragmented than the previous two collections. This is because it reflects the "physical and geo-psychic fragmentation of the islands themselves" (Brathwaite, "Interview" 19). The fragmentation is evinced in the heterogeneity of images as in this poem. The boundaries between the natural and the supernatural are collapsed and both are presented without any hierarchical presuppositions on the part of the author. Ananse is at once a common house spider in the homes of the poor people as well as the figure who inspired the heroes of Caribbean history. The various different cultures with their attendant histories (the British Caribbean in Jamaica and the French Caribbean in Haiti) interpenetrate each other within the poem. A similar fusion occurs in the case of folklore and different mythologies such as the Haitian and the Greek evoked through the presence of the gods Legba and Hephaestus. Since the

term magical realism has general reference to fiction and has rarely been applied to poetry, Brathwaite has given his own interpretation of it:

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How the metaphors and images interlock and interweave and interpenetrate each other, so that you increasingly have . . . a seamless kind of poetry, increasing without punctuation, where images inform, flow and influence each other. It is a kind of surrealism as well, but magical realism, I think, is nearer to it, because it is the transformation of reality into the prism of imagination and light.

(“Interview” 22)

I have already explained how the images fuse into one another. Stylistically this is presented by the short lines of the poem running into each other as in this example, “no glamour of noon on man-// grove shore,” where the word mangrove broken into two conveys an “osmosis” of human actions into the natural surroundings. This was historically proved by the various battles for freedom fought using guerrilla tactics in which the natural surroundings became an ally. In the last few lines of Brathwaite’s comment there is the idea of reality seen through the “prism” of imagination. This is also the idea with which “Ananse” begins. The prismatic qualities of glass, crystal and quartz, mentioned in the first few lines of the poem, in which Ananse is fossilized, waiting to be revitalized through folk memory, poetically render the same image Brathwaite has used in the interview.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

Brathwaite’s work as a historian and cultural critic informs his poetry. An awareness of the cultural origins of certain phenomenon like Rastafarianism and figures like Ananse is evinced in their contextualisation both in poetry and prose. These are a medium for the expression of “folk” or people’s views on the social reality of their existence. The Rastafarian’s critique of materialism and Ananse’s ability to inspire historical figures are instances of popular and folk culture playing a decisive role in socio-historical processes. Another aspect of Brathwaite’s poetry at this stage is the incorporation of oral rhythms. The free verse pattern he uses facilitates this orality since it allows him to experiment with varying line lengths, some even comprised of one word or one syllable.

The poems from *Masks*, the central volume of the trilogy, express the rootedness of Caribbean culture in Africa through the journey of the Ashanti people in search of a new land. Here the poetic persona returns to the land of his ancestors, a journey which might have influenced the section in Walcott’s *Omeros* when Achilles in a quest of identity visits the land of his origins and meets his father, Afolabe. Brathwaite’s persona in *Masks* undertakes an unsuccessful search for roots:

I travelled to a distant town
I could not find my mother
I could not find my father
I could not hear the drum
Whose ancestor am I? (Arrivants 125)

Some connectedness with the African past is expressed in the last volume *Islands* in poems like “Ananse,” “Vévé” and “Negus,” but ultimately it is aspects of the region’s degeneration - its racial disharmony, materialist and tourist oriented economy, fraudulent religious cults - which underlie the pessimistic vision with which the trilogy concludes, “making/ with their// rhythms some-/ thing torn// and new” The lack of punctuation at the end of the last verse-line pointing to the continuation of the process of “making” the islands.

4.6 QUESTIONS

- Q.1 Compare and contrast Brathwaite's Rastafarian analysis of Jamaican society in "Wings of a Dove" with Walcott's views on Trinidadian society in "The Spoiler's Return."
- Q.2 Discuss the oral rhythms incorporated by Brathwaite in his poetry with reference to any two of his poems.
- Q.3 Analyse the magical realist elements in "Ananse." Support your answer with detailed textual analysis.

4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

Brathwaite, Edward. *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*. Oxford: OUP, 1973.

Brathwaite, Kamau. "Metaphors of Underdevelopment: A Proem for Hernan Cortez." Brown 231-53.

Secondary Material

Brathwaite, Kamau. "An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite." By Nathaniel Mackey. Brown 13-32.

Brown, Stewart. Ed. *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*. Glamorgan: Seren, 1995.

Irele, Abiola. "The Return of the Native: Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *Masks*." *World Literature Today*. 68(1994): 719-25.

Rohlehr, Gordon. "Blues and Rebellion: Edward Brathwaite's *Rights of Passage*." *Critics on Caribbean Literature*. Ed. Edward Baugh. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978. 63-74.

-- "The Rehumanization of History: Regeneration of Spirit: Apocalypse and Revolution in Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and *X/Self*." Brown 163-207.

Savory, Elaine. "Wordsongs and Wordwounds/Homecoming: Kamau Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems*." *World Literature Today*. 68 (1994): 750-57.

Warner-Lewis, Maureen. "Africa: Submerged Mother." Brown 52-61.

UNIT 5 (EDWARD) KAMAU BRATHWAITE-II

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 The "Video Style"
- 5.2 Angel/Engine
 - 5.2.1 Shango/Ogun
 - 5.2.2 The Text
 - 5.2.3 Analysis
 - 5.2.4 Breathweight
- 5.3 Stone
 - 5.3.1 Death of the Author
 - 5.3.2 The Text
 - 5.3.3 Analysis
 - 5.3.4 Performance Poetry
- 5.4 Colombe
 - 5.4.1 The Discoverer
 - 5.4.2 The Text
 - 5.4.3 Analysis
 - 5.4.4 Seametrics
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Questions
- 5.7 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to familiarise you with poetry from Brathwaite's oeuvre published in his second trilogy and in works of the late 1980s and 1990s. The poetry analysed in this unit is from the collections *Mother Poem* (1977), *Jah Music* (1986) and *Middle Passages* (1993). It demonstrates Brathwaite's broader engagement with Caribbean religious cults, literature and historical antecedents. The unit will also include some details about Brathwaite's recent experiments with poetic forms particularly evident in print and typography.

5.1 THE "VIDEO STYLE"

Reception of Brathwaite's poetry in the eighties and the nineties has shown two contradictory trends. On the one hand he has gained recognition as a poet of international repute and on the other he is finding it increasingly difficult to find publishers for his work. In 1986 he was awarded the Casa de las Américas Prize for Literature for *Roots*, a volume of essays on Caribbean literature and culture. In 1994 he was selected by an international jury of writers as the thirteenth laureate of the Neustadt International Prize for Literature. In the same year the autumn issue of *World Literature Today* was completely devoted to his work and contained articles by internationally renowned critics. It is therefore surprising to learn that many of the writer's completed works, both prose and poetry, have not been accepted for publication on the grounds of there being no market for experimental work. In my analysis of "Ananse" I had explained how Brathwaite conceives the role of the poet in the Caribbean as similar to that of the *griot* in African cultures. The *griot* is both carver of wood and singer of songs thus combining the aural and visual aspects of creation. Brathwaite speaks of his recent creative output in these terms:

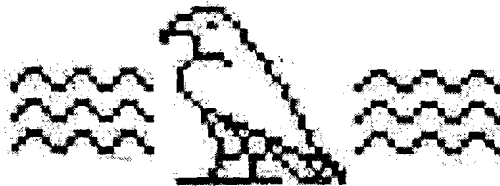
When I started off, everything I did I read aloud into the tape recorder. I also wanted it to look interesting. Now, with the

computer, I have really gone into that, into what I call my Video style.

I think that oral traditions do have a very strong visual aspect. In the African tradition, they use sculpture. Really, what I'm trying to do is create word-sculptures on the page, but word-song for the ear. (qtd. in Rigby 708)

forget being 'the most lit/erate of West Indian islands' for nuffen But/
So to my 'surprise, he TOOK ONLY TWO - his 'justification' being 'WE
LL, ITS A BIT OF A PIG IN A POKE, ISN'T IT?' to translate which I had to re-
member that Barbados was/ 'is also the most English of the Caribbean islands...')

**LE IS ALSO THE ONLY MU-
OP LITERATURE-PRODUCING
CARIBBEAN TERRITORY WITH
OUT A NATIONAL ANTHOLOGY
OF ANY SORT TO ITS NATURE.**



The islands roared into green plantations
ruled by silver sugar cane
sweet & profit
cruel & profit
n Islands ruled by sugar cane

And of course it was a wonderful time
a profitable hospitable well worth-your-time

120

FROM KAMAU BRATHWAITE, *BARABAJAN POEMS*, 1991

The poetry in *The Zee Mexican Diary*, *Middle Passages*, *Barabajan Poems* and the prose of *Dream Stories* is written in this style. Brathwaite's "word sculptures" explore the capacity of the computer to render graphically the nuances of language by experimenting with several font and type styles. The reader is unsettled by the different fonts and types used on the same page to indicate tonal quality. For instance a word spoken in a higher than normal pitch in ordinary conversation might be in large type and be highlighted or italicized. Words are broken, deliberately misspelt, given faulty punctuation, interspersed with brackets, asterisks,

abbreviations and other characteristics deliberately in opposition to the poetic conventions of "Prospero's language." As Elaine Savory has observed, Brathwaite has forwarded the idea of Caliban returning home, linguistically and spiritually, to his mother Sycorax. There is more freedom for Caliban in turning to his mother's language than in using his energy to curse Prospero. He recounts his relationship to the computer, his aide in the reclamation of his mother's language, in "Letter Sycorax" from *Middle Passages*:

Dear *mamma*
i writing you dis letter/wha?
guess what! pun a computer o/kay?
like i jine de mercantilists?
well not quite . . .
if yu cyaan beat prospero
whistle

Brathwaite has spoken of Sycorax as the muse in the computer. This is a playful way of accounting how the computer has become an ally in his poetic challenge to Prospero's world (Savory 228). This extract contains many features of the video style such as the use of italics, slashes and lack of punctuation in the first and last lines. It is, however, fairly close to normal type settings which makes it relatively easy to publish unlike some of Brathwaite's other poems.

Given above is a page from *Barabajan Poems*. You can see for yourself the difficulty which any publisher would face in printing this, and yet, since the work has come out in print, the problems are not as insurmountable as they are made out to be. The reluctance of leading publishing houses like Oxford University Press who were associated with Brathwaite's early work can therefore be seen as Prospero's containment of Caliban's rebellion against language (Savory 221).

5.2 ANGEL/ENGINE

5.2.1 Shango/Ogun

Worship of the Yoruba deities Shango and Ogun is concretised in this poem through the chants of the worshippers and an enactment of possession. The poem captures ideas of transition between the indigenous world and modernity, between the African past and the Caribbean present, as well as the presence of the one in the other. Ogun is the Yoruba patron deity of war, iron and metallic instruments; Shango is the god of the thunderbolt and lightning. Together the Ogun/Shango persona is a spirit of fire, energy and iron resolve in the breasts of the subjugated (Rohlehr, "Rehumanization" 175). In his essay "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature" Brathwaite has outlined the attack launched on African forms of worship and socialization by the plutocracy in colonial times. This was intended to prevent the slaves from grouping as a community. The legislation passed against cults of *Shango* worship, *obeah* and *cumfu* persisted in many Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Surinam even after independence. However, these spiritual traditions have become politically important as defences against oppression in recent times. In this poem the poor woman who joins a worship group is one of the common exploited masses for whom possession by *loas* (gods) is a possible means of escape from her existence.

The setting for the rituals of this worship group is a Zionist chapel rather like the one described by Walcott, "a tin-roofed shed in the back of a choirmaster's house, half shango-chapel, half Presbyterian country vestry . . ." ("WTS" 28). Here the repetitive chanting induces a state of transcendence in the chanters. As Brathwaite has explained in *The Arrivants*, possession is induced by the drums or by rhythmic hand-clapping and chanting. The celebrant's body acts as a kind of lightning conductor for god, the "divine electrical charge" becomes grounded so that the earth and the things

of the earth assume a special significance. He also adds that this experience was commonplace in the early Christian churches which, in many ways, were more "African" than "European" (271). The reference to Christianity is significant because of the relationship of some shango cult beliefs to *vodoun* in which Christian saints are merged into the rituals. The title of the poem indicates this by the word "Angel" included in it. The second word of the title refers to the engine of the locomotive which has become one of the guises of Shango, god of thunder and creativity, in the New World. Their almost-similar pronunciation and the slash between them points to the identity-in-difference between the Christian and African forms of worship mentioned by Brathwaite in his notes to *The Arrivants*.

5.2.2 The Text

Angel/Engine

1

The yard around which the smoke circles
is bounded by kitchen, latrine and the wall
of the house where her aunt died, where
her godma brought her up, where she was jumped
upon by her copperskin cousin
driving canemen to work during crop
time, smelling of rum and saltfish;
who gave her two children when, so she say,
her back was turn to the man, when she wasn't lookin.
the children grew up quietly
the boy runnin bout like a pump-
kin vine, the girl name christofene
they went to st saviour primary school
then the boy sit down an win a exam
an gone down de hill to de college.
christie still bout here turnin foolish
she us:ed to help me to sew
an mek up de cloze pun de singer
sewin machine: but she fingers gone dead
and she int got eyes in she head.
then one two tree wutless men come up in here
an impose a pregnant pun she.
one tek
but de other two both foetus dead.
now she sittin up dere wid she hann in she lapp in de corner
rockin sheself in a chair by de window
and as far i know, she too cud be dead

2

i tek up dese days wid de zion
we does meet tuesdee nights in de carpenter shop

praaaze be to god
i hear de chapman hall preacher shout out

praaaze be to god

an i hear de black wings risin
and i feel de black rock rock

*praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg*

*praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg*

an i holdin my hands up high in dat place
and de palms turn to

*praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg*

an the fingers flutter an flyin away
an i cryin out

*praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to
softly*

an de softness flyin away

is a black
is a bat
is a flap

o de kerosene lamp

an it spinn
an it spinn
an it spinn-

in rounn
and it stagger-
in down

to a gutter-
in shark
o'de worl'

*praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg*

*praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to gg*

de tongue curlin back
an muh face flowin empty
all muh skin cradle an crackle an ole

i is water of wood
ants
crawlin crawlin

i is spiders weavin
away

my ball
headed head

is ancient an
black an it

fall from de top
o de praaaze be to

tree to de rat-
hearted coco-

nut hill.

so uh walk-
in an talk-

in: uh stepp-
in an call-

in thru
echo-

in faces
that barren an bare of my name

thru crick
crack

thru crick
crack

a creak-
in thru crev-

ices, reach-
in for i-

cicle light
who hant me
huh

who haunt me
huh

my head is a cross
is a cross-

road

who hant me
is red

who haunt me
is blue

is a man
is a moo
is a ton ton macou

is a coo
is a cow
is a cow-

itch

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

huh

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hah
is a hearse
is a horse
is a horseman

is a trip
is a trick
is a seamless hiss

that does rattle these iron tracks

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

huh

bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups
bub-a-dups

hah

is a scissors gone *shhaaaa*

under de rattle an pain

i de go
huh

i de go
shhhaaaa

an a black curl callin my name

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

sh

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

shang

praaaze be to
sh

praaaze be to
gg

praaaze be to
praaaze be to
praaaze be to

ssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhh

3

an de train comin in wid de rain ...

Glossary

copperskin:	brown-skinned
canemen:	workers in sugarcane plantations
saltfish:	salted dried codfish imported from Canada, historically as standard food for slaves, but currently a valued item in many Caribbean dishes. The word is also used as a derogatory reference to somebody of a low class or character. Both senses are implied here.
Christofene:	creolized version of the name Christophene
wutless:	worthless
zion:	name for nonconformist chapel
chapman:	literally pedlar but probably used here by Brathwaite because of its similarity with chaplain, a clergyman officiating in a private chapel.
flap:	broad hanging piece attached by one side only
shark:	"sharking" in Caribbean vocabulary is a word used for greedy, gluttonous behaviour
water:	a disease which causes swelling of the body with fluid

rat:	a prostitute of the lowest kind
crick crack:	formula used to introduce and end an Anancy story or folktale, in some cases the storyteller first cries out Crick and the audience response is Crack! i.e. Go ahead.
red:	the colour red is a prominent feature of Shango worship
moo:	probably Brathwaite's abbreviation of "moo-moo," a person who is shy or afraid to speak and by extension a stupidly silent person.
ton:	possibly a form of "tonto" meaning foolish
macou:	it is quite likely Brathwaite had in mind "mako," an inquisitive, meddlesome individual
coo:	the word "kuku" was used in W. Africa for a professional cook
cow:	to "work cow" is a phrase implying to work on the side for one's personal gain using the employer's equipment, materials and time.
cow-itch:	a plant with pods densely covered with hair which can cause skin-irritation

Edward
Barthwaite-II

5.2.3 Analysis

The "womanist" experience is central to this poem in which the first section mentions a series of relationships between women: the house belongs to the subject's aunt, she was brought up by her "godma" and has a "foolish" daughter named "christofene." The poverty-stricken surroundings are evoked in the first few lines with a mention of the communal yard around which the kitchen, the "latrine" and the house is grouped. The setting is typical of lower working-class neighbourhoods as described in H.G. De Lisser's novels at the turn of the century. De Lisser was a Jamaican novelist whose works *Jane's Career* and *Susan Proudleigh* appeared posthumously in the 1950s. He was one of the few writers to evince interest in working-class female subjects. Brathwaite's exploration of this sensibility shows the influence of this early twentieth century writer. Like De Lisser the women in Brathwaite's poetry are survivors. The unnamed female subject central to this poem lives through orphanage, poverty and sexual exploitation by her drunkard cousin who is probably an overseer at a sugarcane plantation. The low character of this man is indicated not only in the derogatory reference to him as "smelling of rum and saltfish" but also in his use of the woman as an object for his perverse sexual needs. Of the two children she has out of her sexual encounters with him only the girl is identified by name. While the boy is physically and mentally agile and succeeds in winning a scholarship for higher studies, the girl is "foolish" or simple minded. She is another one in the family's line of women taken advantage of by worthless men. That she wasn't always listless and foolish is said so by her mother to whom she was a help in her work of stitching people's clothes. It is only when she loses her child or "foetus," as her mother clinically observes, that she becomes her present self. What happens to the one child she conceived and gave birth to, as the word "tek" indicates, is not made clear. However, from the inactive, depressed state in which she sits by the window in her rocking chair the evident surmise would be that this child too must have died soon after birth.

While the first part alternates between the poet's and his subject's (the woman's) voice, the second section of the poem is entirely the latter's first person account. She describes how she joins a group of worshippers who meet every Tuesday night in a carpenter's shop. The plebian origins of this worship group with a "chapman hall preacher" ensure some kind of solidarity on non-exploitative terms for people like this poor woman. Her experience is interspersed with the chants of the preacher and the congregation. Although she undergoes a transcendental experience in which she feels her fingers reaching towards heaven, she cannot bring herself to join in the chanting. It is almost as if she chokes on the word god, unable to pronounce it, "praaaze be to gg." Like her fingers she feels her "soft" voice ascending upwards. This she compares to a bat and to the flap of a kerosene lamp. The bat's flight and the flame of the lamp both convey a sense of movement. She experiences possession which might be the result of the chanting she tries to participate in. Her voice raised in praise seems to have acquired a will of its own for it eddies round and round like a whirlpool and then finally descends to the lower depths of this materialistic world. Probably what is being suggested is that worship is a temporary solace and that finally adherents in any belief have to cope with the actualities of the world, however sordid they might be.

This realization taken in conjunction with her inability to articulate the name of "god," whom the others are praising, brings grief to her. Although her tongue curls back to utter the word the effort is a wasted one and brings tears which run down her "crackled," wrinkled skin. She feels that she has incurred the wrath of the deity she is unable to invoke. The feeling of guilt manifests itself in the sensations of her body swelling, ants crawling, getting trapped in a web of her own "weavin" and falling from heights. The call and response pattern of the chanting is indicated through the formula "crick crack." Echoing the preacher's voice the people in the congregation seem to be linked to each other. But this is only a superficial unity, for apart from the name of "god" they do not know each other even by name. In their search for the "light" of belief they are like mice digging upwards from the earth. The woman feels she is haunted by a presence which, going by the colour "red," could be a shango visitation. Rather than feel elated by this experience she feels disturbed, equating this with the presence of an inquisitive, meddlesome, foolish person. The series of images given here is linked by sound rather than strict logic. See for instance the passage in which she calls her visitant a cook and a manipulating person who is as irritating as the "cow-itch" plant. In another passage he is seen in conjunction with images of death: "hearse," "horse," "horseman." The liberation she feels is a "trip" of joy but since it is short-lived it is also a "trick."

An additional association of Shango, linked not only with railroads but more commonly with bursts of rage against dishonesty and injustice, occurs not only in this poem but also in "Word Making Man," a poem from Brathwaite's *Middle Passages*. The last part of the poem stresses these associations repeatedly through the various sound effects. The "rattle and the pain" of this woman is temporarily suspended in the mysticism of possession. Hers is not anger against an unjust society but rather a hope of amelioration. This repository of this hope is the being under whose influence she believes herself to be even if she is not able to utter this deity's name. The god/shango duality becomes an unresolvable choice for her since she is unable to speak either word. The last line of the poem contains a reference to the "train," one of the guises of Shango. It seems to proffer the view that caught between the Christian/African world views, each with their attendant religious beliefs, it is the latter at which people will arrive after achieving some kind of a resolution of these almost contradictory belief systems which are the legacy of colonialism to Caribbean society.

5.2.4 Breathweight

"Angel/Engine" is from the final section of Brathwaite's 1977 collection *Mother Poem*. This section is entitled "Koumfort" and in its the possibility of spiritual

renewal is imagined. Coined from the Haitian creole word for temple, *houmfor*, the title of this section suggests ways in which African connections are preserved (Dash 206). Religion is one such way and this poem details its performative nature primarily through the oral effects captured in it. I have called this section "Breathweight" which is a Brathwaite neologism and a pun on his own name, particularly apt in terms of the way in which his work plays on the voice. The sound of the steam engine hissing is onomatopoeically reproduced in the reiteration of "bub-a-dups." Besides signalling the presence of Shango it probably indicates the location of the area where the meetings of these worshippers are held. I pointed out at the beginning of the analysis that this is a working class neighbourhood. It could well be that it is a shanty town clustered, like many such towns, near the railway tracks. The sound effects interspersed through the poem are also present in the form of explosions of breath: "huh" and "hah." These have been explained as the primal sounds of the *loa*'s lovemaking and as the early stages of divine language when "words were breathed sounds scarcely differentiated from one another" (Rohelehr, "Rehumanization" 199). Under the influence of the *loa*, vocabulary becomes monosyllabically primal. As the woman becomes completely possessed by the *loa* her voice is subsumed until towards the end the hissing sound has only Shango as its referent.

5.3 STONE

5.3.1 Death of the Author

Political censorship and violence is a feature of contemporary Caribbean culture. Martin Carter of Guyana, an activist, poet and historian has described how he was arrested in Trinidad and later extradited to Guyana, his native country, only to face three months at a detention camp. This was in 1953 when Britain imposed direct rule on Guyana. Carter's *Poems of Resistance*, published in 1954, arose out of this experience of persecution for his nationalist political activities. Edgar Mittleholzer from British Guiana faced rejection slips from his British publishers for nearly twelve years. He had attempted suicide in 1936. Eric Roach of Trinidad who wrote lyric poetry with peasants as his subjects swam out to sea in 1974. The bomb which killed the radical Guyanese historian Walter Rodney in 1980 was labelled a successful suicide attempt by the authorities. In an address given at the Guyana Prize for Literature, 1987, Gordon Rohlehr commented on the detrimental effect of the Caribbean social, political and cultural conditions on writers: "Under such states, such unchange, some writers have chosen the amnesia of alcohol. Others, like Mittleholzer, Leroy Calliste, Eric Roach, the painter and folklorist Harold Simmons, committed suicide by rope, poison, the knife or fire" (qtd. in Markham 40). I use the word "Death" in the title of this section not metaphorically (as in Roland Barthes's essay with the same title) but literally. Silencing here is not only by the imposition of censorship and publishing restrictions but more often by the death, self-imposed or murderous, of the author.

The life and career of Michael or Mikey Smith (1954-83) prove that even death may not succeed in silencing a revolutionary voice. Smith was born in Kingston, Jamaica and came from a working class background (his father was a mason and his mother a factory worker). Although he claimed to have been educated on the streets he did graduate from the Jamaican School of Drama in 1980. There he used to "hang out" a lot with Brathwaite with whom he became, in Brathwaite's own words, "quite close" as a student. Smith's rise as a performer of his own work was meteoric. He performed at the Carifesta (Caribbean Festival of Arts) in Barbados in 1981, at the First International Bookfair of Radical Black and Third World Books in London in 1982, did a B.B.C. commentary and a UNESCO performance in Paris in the same year. On 17 August 1983 he was stoned to death by four men at Stony Hill, St. Andrew, Jamaica, during the election campaign. Brathwaite's poem "Stone" from the 1986 collection *Jah Music* is a tribute to Mikey Smith. In the same year *Race Today*

Publishers published a collection of Smith's work, *It A Come*, selected and introduced by the Jamaican poet Mervyn Morris. Records of Smith's performances specially "Mi Cyaan Believe It," his film for the BBC along with Brathwaite's poem and Morris's collection of his work, ensure that death has not silenced his voice which continues to influence poets and performers.

5.3.2 The Text

Stone

(for Mikey Smith)

When the stone fall that morning out of the johncrow sky
if was not dark at first, that opening on to the red sea sky
but something in my mouth like feathers. blue like bubbles and light
carrying signals & planets & the sliding curve of the world like a water
picture
in a raindrop when the pressure drop

When the stone fall that morning i
couldn't cry out because my mouth was full of beast & plunder
as if i was gnashing badwords among tombstones
as if angry water was beating up against the curbstones of the
palisadoes
as if that road up Stony Hill round the bend by the churchyard on the
way to the

post office was a bad bad dream and the dream was on fire all the way
past the
white houses higher up the hill and the ogogs bark
ing all teeth & furnace and my mother like she upside down up a
tree like
she was screaming and nobody i could hear could hear a word i
shouting
even though there were so many poems left and the tape was switched
on & running
and the green light was red and they was standing up everywhere in
London
& Amsterdam & at UNESCO in Paris & in West Berlin & clapping &
clapping &
clapping & not a soul on Stony Hill to even say amen. and yet it was
happening happening
the fences began to crack in my skull and there were loud *booooooongs*
like
guns going off them ole time magnums or like fireworks where i
dreadlocks were in fire
and the gaps where the river coming down and the dry gully where
my teeth used to be
smiling and my tuff gong tongue that used to press against them &
parade pronunciation

now unannounce and like a black wick in i head & dead
and it was like a heavy heavy riddim low down in i belly bleeding dub
and there was like this heavy black dog thumping in i chest & pumping
murdererrrrrrrr

and my throat like dem tie like dem tie a tight tie around it. twist
ing my neck quick crick quick crick and a never wear neck
tie yet and a laughing more blood and spittin out lawwwwwwwwwd
and i two eye lock to the sun and the two sun staring back bright from
the grass and i

bline to de butterfly flittin. but i hear de tread of my heart
the heavy flux of the blood in my veins silver tambourines
closer & closer. st joseph band crashing &
closer & bom sicai sica boom ship bell &
closer & bom sicai sica boom ship bell &
when the saints...

and it was like a wave on Stony Hill caught in a crust of sunlight
and it was like a broken schooner into harbour muffled in the silence
of its wound
and it was like the blue of peace was filling up the heavens with its
thunder
and it was like the wind was growing skin the skin had hard hairs
hardening
it was like Marcus Garvey rising from his coin. stepping towards his
people
crying dark. and every mighty word he trod the ground fell dark &
hole behind
him like it was a scream i did not know and yet it was a scream. my
ears were bleeding
sound. and i was quiet now because i had become that sound

the sunlit morning washed the coral limestone harsh against the soft
volcanic ash
i was & it was slipping past me into water & it was slipping past me
into root
i was & it was slipping past me into flower & it was ripping upward
into shoot
while every tongue in town was lashing me with spit & cutrass wit &
ivy whip &
wrinkle jumbimum. it was like warthog grunting in the ground. and
children run
ning down the hill run right on through the splashes
that my breathing made when it was howl & red & bubble and sparrow

twits pluck tic & tapeworm from the grass
as if i-man did never have no face as if i-man did never in this place

When the stone fell that morning out of the johncrow sky
i could not hold it back or black it back or block it off or limp away
or roll it from me into memory or light or rock it steady into night be
cause it builds me now and fills my blood with deaf my bone with dumb &

lawww

i am the stone that kills me.

Glossary

curbstones:	stones forming the border or edges
palisade:	fence of iron railings or wooden stakes
ogogs:	probably dogs
magnums:	bottle containing two quarts of wine

dreadlocks:	members of the Rastafarian cult usually wear their hair uncut and falling in long, plaited or matted locks about their shoulders.
dub:	dub music has a two beat rhythm and is associated with Black folk-culture in the Caribbean.
tambourines:	small drum held in the hand with loose jingling metal discs.
band:	at Carnival a group of masqueraders in highly ornate costumes illustrating in particular sections a particular theme (historical, topical or imaginary). They jump through the streets to the music of a steelband.
boom:	a big bass drum used by masquerade bands
schooner:	a ship with more than one mast
Marcus Garvey:	founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica in 1914. It was later based in USA and gave rise to Garvey's 1922 'Back-to-Africa' repatriation movement.
cutrass:	probably 'cutlass,' a labourer's tool for cutting cane, bush, etc.
wrinkle jumbim:	a jumbi is an evil spirit of the dead that assumes human form. In the story "Ol Higue," a Guyanese folktale retold by Ralph Prince, an old woman "wrinkled skin Becky Winter" sheds her skin every night to suck the blood of children.
warthog:	a large-headed African swine

5.3.3 Analysis

The poet assumes the persona of Mikey Smith to present the last moments of his life when he was stoned to death. Nature assumes a predatory aspect, the sky is first called threatening or "johncrow" and then later, when the stone comes flying through it, "red sea sky." I think here the allusion is to the waters of the Red Sea parting to allow the Israelites to pass through and then closing in to drown the Pharaoh's soldiers pursuing them. Besides the Biblical allusion the colour "red" also assumes symbolic significance because of the perpetration of violence on the individual whose thoughts constitute the poem. Before the stone hit him there was no darkness but rather a feeling of peace, almost ecstasy, which is compared to a microcosmic view of the world reflected in a drop of water as it falls from the sky.

The persona describes how he was not able to articulate the pain he felt that morning because he seemed to be choking on all the anger, rage, resentment he had within him. The futility of these emotional outbursts against injustice, which Smith expressed in his poetry, is captured in the words "gnashing badwords among tombstones." Other images used to describe the same feelings are: water beating against barriers and the dogs barking with nobody paying any attention to them. This refers to the social and political implications of Smith's poetry which dealt with issues like poverty, education, exploitation of the lower classes, and materialism in contemporary society. The most powerful image conveying futility in the poem is that of the mother hanging upside down from a tree with nobody paying any attention

to her screams. Please recall that Smith's mother was a factory worker, so this image is probably meant to convey the hapless life-in-death existence of all working class women in general. Looking at this sight the poet "shouts" out his indignation (in verse) but it seems as if his words are wasted, "nobody i could hear could hear a word i shouting." These would also have been the themes of his future poetry had he been given a chance to keep "the tape . . . switched on and running." Smith had performed his poetry all over Europe and had also given a performance for the UNESCO in 1982. The acclaim he received there is indicated by the reiteration of the word "clapping." This is contrasted with the silence on Stony Hill where there is nobody to pronounce even a blessing on the dying man.

The last moments of Smith's life are described by him in terms of a release of all the emotions which were expressed in his poetry. Fences cracking, guns going off, a river rushing down a gully, dreadlocks on fire are images used to convey both the physical and the emotional effects of the attack. The blood running inside his mouth is like a river flowing down; his tongue has lost its power to speak with the emphasis it previously had. Like a dysfunctional instrument it now has the power only to "unannounce." The only word which comes out, in a "heavy riddim" from the guts, is "murdererrrrrrr." Life ebbing out of him is experienced as somebody slowly twisting his neck so that the only activity possible is spitting out the blood and uttering the name of the lord. Nature as an unresponsive witness to this act is evinced in the "stare" of the sun and the "flittin" of the butterfly. In these few moments before death he becomes acutely conscious of usually unnoticed functions like the flow of blood in the veins. This natural bodily music is like the music played by "bands" at Carnival. The masqueraders in Carnival select a particular theme each year whether historical, topical or imaginary. Smith imagines that the band whose music he hears has selected a nautical theme. The noise of the ship bells reproduced in the poem is a reverberation of the sound of his own bodily functions heard by the dying man. Wave-like, the music rises only to hit against the "broken schooner" of his injured body seeking its "harbour."

The sense of peace which he now feels outside is also within him. Experiencing oneness with the elements of nature he speaks of the wind as a tangible presence much like Marcus Garvey come alive. An affinity with Garvey is stressed because of his emphasis on social reform and on Africa as a means of asserting Black identity. Garvey's ideas were considered the precursor of the Rastafarian movement. Smith's links with the Rastas are evinced throughout the poem in his use of the pronoun "i" and a mention of "dreadlocks." Garvey's words did have an effect on people's minds in his times and on subsequent generations. This is presented as his "mighty word[s]" making holes in the ground he trod upon. It impinges upon Smith's consciousness like a "scream" quite unlike his own scream in the first half of the poem which is not heard by anybody. In a way Garvey's demands for social justice and equality were echoed by Smith. He becomes conscious of this only in the moment when his ears "bleed" or are full of sounds which had an impact on him and he recognises "i had become that sound."

Throughout my analysis of the poem I have emphasised how the elements are invested with the emotions of the dying man. These last few lines which I will now discuss reinforce this theme. Fire, water and air are the three elements the poet has already touched upon. Now it is the earth or rather the "soft volcanic ash" which he sees as having regenerative potential. While nature follows its own course, giving rise to life in the form of flowers and other plants, it is men who deviate from the natural course of their lives to attack others. These attacks can be verbally or actively vicious. No poet with a reformist agenda can please everybody. It is to his detractors, who attacked him with a violent "wit" and with threats of possession by "jumbis" or evil spirits, that these lines are directed. They are labelled "warthogs" snouting around for something they can take offence at. Idyllic scenes of children running, birds twittering are juxtaposed against his own agonised breathing which is more like a howl. The birds are as indifferent to his plight as if he never existed. Towards the end of the poem it is the inevitability of the attack which is highlighted:

"i could not hold it back or black it. . . ." The coming together of the object as well as the subject of attack concludes the poem. Unlike an imaginative perception which the poet can retain in his memory and later transmute into poetry, the stone is a concrete material object which leads to the physical effects of impairment and finally death. It is significant that the Smith persona in this poem does not directly affix the blame on his attackers. The stone, from being the instrument of death, comes to epitomise the condition of the man who has died since he becomes as inanimate as it: "i am the stone that kills me."

5.3.4 Performance Poetry

In the Caribbean, poetry is not just words printed on a page but also spoken aloud for an audience. There has been a tradition of poets teaming up with musicians for performances. Even the deejays, who erase the words from records, retaining the music to improvise the words as they perform, have been labelled as poets. Michael Smith belonged to a group of poet-performers called "dub poets" by the British Caribbean performer Linton Kwesi Johnson. Dub poetry is characterised by lines meant to be spoken, generally to a two-beat rhythm, dealing mostly with the life experiences or point of view of Black people. The most celebrated example is Smith's frequently anthologised poem "Me Cyaan Believe It." I give below a few lines from it:

Me seh me cyaan believe it
Me seh me cyaan believe it
Room dem a rent
me apply widin
but as me go een
cockroach rat and scorpion
also come een

(*Hinterland* 286)

If you read these lines aloud you will be able to get some idea of its beat. As is apparent the lines are about a poor man forced to rent a room (probably in a tenement) infested with insects and animals. It is in this poem that Smith uses the technique Brathwaite has incorporated in his tribute to him: "But me know yuh believe it/ Lawwwwwwwwd/ me know yuh believe it." Elsewhere Brathwaite has commented on Smith's remarkable voice and breath control on stage accompanied by the "decorative" noise of the Japanese S90 motorbike: "On the page, Smith's *Lawwwwwwwwd* is the S-90" ("History" 301). Not only is this reproduced in this poem but it is also added to when Brathwaite makes the Smith persona pronounce "murdererrrrrrr." The inclusion of these sound effects is Brathwaite's tribute to the performative aspect of poetry epitomised by Michael Smith.

5.4 COLOMBE

5.4.1 The Discoverer

Christopher Columbus (in Spanish, Cristobal Colon) 'discovered' the New World on October 12, 1492 when he landed on an island called Guanahani by the Indians and named San Salvador by him. It is this moment which is the subject of this poem. The poem is from Brathwaite's 1992 collection *Middle Passages*, the year which marked the Columbus quincentennial 'celebrations.' These were embroiled in controversy following protests by native Americans for whom the discovery had also meant extermination. As far back as 1967 Naipaul had written an article "Columbus and Crusoe" in which he had commented with characteristic irony: "He [Columbus] claimed . . . that he had got rid of two-thirds of the natives of Hispaniola in two years; the remainder had been set to gathering gold dust. (This was an exaggeration : he

had only got rid of a third)" (221). The beginnings of this moment which inaugurated New World history for Europe is delineated in Brathwaite's poem.

Edward
Barthwaite-II

The figure of Columbus, like that of Crusoe, has held a special attraction for Caribbean writers. Brathwaite himself has used the Columbus motif in many poems in *The Arrivants*. As Simon Gikandi has observed: given the consequences of European "modernization" of the New World, it appears almost impossible for Caribbean writers to accept Todorov's claim that "we are all direct descendants of Columbus" and that "it is with him that our genealogy begins" (2). The claims to modernization and discovery made on behalf of Columbus's arrival are all more problematic considering the fact that it was by accident that he came here. He had originally set out to reach Asia by a Western route. To add to this was the fact that his motives were openly mercenary, only tangentially geographical and civilizational only in so far as they helped further the former. This should put to rest any Eurocentric assumptions about Columbus's arrival being universally beneficial and hence a cause of 'celebration.'

5.4.2 The Text

"Colombe"

C

olumbus from his after-
deck watched stars, absorbed in water,
melt in liquid amber drifting
through my summer air
Now with morning shadows lifting
beaches stretched before him cold & clear
Birds circled flapping flag & mizzen
mast. Birds harshly hawking. without fear
Discovery he sailed for. was so near.

C

olumbus from his after-
deck watched heights he hoped for
rocks he dreamed. rise solid from my simple water
Parrots screamed. Soon he would touch
our land. his charted mind's desire
The blue sky blessed the morning with its fire
But did his vision
fashion as he watched the shore
the slaughter that his soldiers
furthered here? Pike
point & musket butt
hot splintered courage. Bones
cracked with bullet shot
tipped black boot in my belly. The
whips uncurled desire?

C

olumbus from his after-
deck saw bearded fig trees. Yellow pouis
blazed like pollen & thin
waterfalls suspended in the green
as his eyes climbed towards the highest ridges
where our farms were hidden
Now he was sure
he heard soft voices mocking in the leaves
What did this journey mean. this
new world mean. dis
covery? or a return to terrors
he had sailed from. Known before?
I watch him pause
Then he was splashing silence
Crabs snapped their claws
And scattered as he walked towards our shore

Glossary

afterdeck:	deck near the rear portion of a ship
amber:	yellow coloured
mizzen mast:	mast next to the rear of the main mast
hawking:	flying with the intention of preying on other birds
Pike:	long wooden shaft with pointed metal head
musket:	gun
bearded fig tree:	a tree with fig like berries, called bearded because of the resemblance of its hanging aerial roots to beards
pouis:	a large decorative tree which sheds its leaves and flowers annually

5.4.3 Analysis

The letter "C" in bold type with which each stanza of the poem is superscribed is apparently formed by splitting Columbus's name so that all three stanzas begin with "olumbus." Not only is the letter "C" indicative of the name of the explorer but also of the region he claimed to have discovered: the Caribbean. It also has the same pronunciation as "sea," on which the discoverer sailed to come to this region. Brathwaite's play with language acquires other dimensions if the word "olumbus" is broken into its constituent words, each of which has a typically Caribbean meaning. It can be seen to be made up of "ol," "um" and "bus." Take the first word which means old and implies that Columbus was in his old age when he discovered the region. This is historically accurate for his date of birth is usually taken to be c.1445 which means that he was approaching old age when he landed at San Salvador in 1492. The second constituent "um" is creole for the third person pronoun 'him,' sometimes used derogatively. The last word "bus" is a shortened form of "bluss" meaning to deliver a sudden blow, cut, wound or whip. Taken together these words posit Columbus as the perpetrator of violence which is elaborated upon in the second stanza.

The idea of peace conveyed through Columbus's observation of the stars reflected in the sea gives a false sense of security. Towards morning the sight of the beaches a little distance away marks the goal of his voyage. The poem is from the perspective of a native inhabitant of the area discovered by the voyager. This Amerindian shifts between the first person singular and plural pronouns, "my" and "our," to describe the devastation wreaked on his land and its inhabitants. It is therefore curious to observe that Columbus's anticipation and expectation is also vividly presented in the poem. The Amerindian persona clearly has an omniscient perspective. That the scenario would be a wish fulfilment fantasy for Columbus is borne out by the words that the land is "his charted mind's desire." An idyllic sunrise in the blue skies, the sight of trees native to the region (bearded fig and pois), the gushing waterfalls are all a fulfilment of his exotic imaginings. This exoticism is undercut by the harsh reality of the violence unleashed on the natives by the soldiers accompanying and following Columbus. Significantly the weapons used for attack: the pike and the musket emblemise the missile which, in Brathwaite's view, is the governing symbol of Western culture. Needless violence is a prefiguration of colonialism, "whips uncurled desire."

Even the fulfilment of his longed for dream of discovery does not satisfy Columbus. He imagines he hears voices among the trees which mock his life's endeavour. Breaking the word "discovery" into two Brathwaite changes its sense so that it comes to mean an uncovering of "dis," the underworld in classical mythology. This does not mean that the New World is hellish but rather that the impulse which led Columbus to its search was dark in its origin. If he had undertaken the voyage for a cathartic purpose, to rid himself of whatever was dark or negative in him, then clearly that purpose has been defeated. Like the crabs snapping their claws the colonists reveal the ugly side of human nature when they come in contact with those living on the land they claim to have discovered. It is with this potent image of antagonism embedded in human nature that the poem ends.

5.4.4 Seametrics

A previous version of this poem was published in the first volume of *The Arrivants*. There it is a part of a longer poem from the "Islands and Exiles" section of *Rites of Passage* and is titled "The Emigrants." Like the Caribbean emigrants to first world countries Columbus is seen as an emigrant to the New World, a placing which somehow represses the historical enormity of Columbus's "emigration" for the Amerindians. This is not surprising for at that stage in his career Brathwaite has admitted to "having written a history book which had said there were no Amerindians. . . ." With a change in perspective there came a changed version of the poem. The difference is primarily in the typography. If you look at this poem carefully you will observe that the printed matter tapers upwards from the left and right sides at "c." The last line is longer than the others and forms a kind of a base. Draw lines along the printed matter and observe that the shape is very much like a rocket or a missile. And yet the poem captures the ebb and flow of the sea thematically. Brathwaite has explained this through his concept "seametrics":

I have a thing that I call seametrics, bcause the sea influences
the landscape. The sea influences the nature of poetry--the
pauses between the words, the tidalectic nature of the sea;
which is differnt from the notion of the dialect of the
marksman: all of these things are there in the poetry.

(qtd. in James 763)

While the 'shape' of the poem is that of the marksman, the pike, the bullet, the missile are symbols of an expansionist like Columbus; the rhythm or dialect is that of the sea. This movement of the water backward and forward is expressed through the close and distant scenes which alternate in the poem. From the stars in the water to the heights of the rocks, from the trees near the shore to the "hidden" farms, all are filtered through the consciousness of the Amerindian persona who imagines Columbus observing them. The juxtaposition of an icon of Western civilization with the rhythm of the New World illustrates their encounter in visual and thematic terms.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

I hope you have read Brathwaite's later poetry carefully and now have an idea about the change in his poetic concerns particularly in the eighties and nineties. The diversity of perspectives exhibited is a particularly noticeable feature. Based on an assesment of his first trilogy many commentators had dismissed Brathwaite as a "folk" poet with all the pejorative connotations of parochialism this word seems to have acquired. The selection of poems in this unit is intended to dispel this erroneous notion about his poetry. Freedom from the shackles of pentameter, conventional punctuation, print format and fixed meanings of words through the evolution of a distinct "video style" is evinced in all the poems analysed.

5.6 QUESTIONS

- Q.1 How has Brathwaite presented the impact of religion on the sensibility of the common people in "Angel/Engine"?
- Q.2 What aspects of the "video style" can you discern in the three poems included in this unit? Examine the politics behind them.
- Q.3 Brathwaite often gives us paradigms for an analysis of his own work by coining neologisms. Discuss any two coinages with reference to his poetry.

5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

Brathwaite, Kamau. *Jah Music*. Savacou, 1986.

-- *Middle Passages*. 1992. New York: New Directions, 1993.

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Secondary Material

Dash, J. Michael. "Edward Kamau Brathwaite." *West Indian Literature*. Ed. Bruce King. Sec. ed. London: Macmillan, 1995. 194-208.

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Savory, Elaine. "Returning to Sycorax/ Prospero's Response: Kamau Brathwaite's Word Journey." Brown. 208-30.

UNIT 6 THEORETICAL PARADIGMS FOR CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 History
- 6.2 Intertextuality
- 6.3 Orality
- 6.4 Diaspora
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Questions
- 6.7 Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit I shall be providing some theoretical paradigms for Caribbean literature. You have already read about the creative uses of issues like history, orality, intertextuality, diaspora in addition to metaphors drawn from these and other fields of popular culture. I will now summarise their theoretical formulations as provided by Walcott, Brathwaite and other Caribbean and post-colonial writers. Do remember that although Caribbean literature can be discussed under various rubrics these are not mutually exclusive categories. Indeed all of them have points of contact and a work analysed from one of these angles will invariably contain insights of other approaches.

6.1 HISTORY

Michel Foucault first forwarded the idea of history as a disconnected range of discursive practices. Each practice is a set of rules and procedures governing writing and thinking in a particular field. These rules exclude and regulate knowledge and taken together they form a culture's "archive." As Edward Said demonstrated in his highly influential work *Orientalism*, Western discursivity "produced" the Orient or an "idea" of the East based on certain stereotypical representations. An exploration of the history of colonialism and its literary manifestations is one way of examining how power structures discourse. One instance of this is the teleological view of Western historiography which sees Western man's colonising impulse as the historical "origin" of colonial societies, particularly those in the New World.

Caribbean writers have vehemently rejected this idea which not only undermines the cultural diversity of the region by constituting all its inhabitants as colonial subjects but also invests them with the powerlessness accompanying this situation. A rejection of the linearity of history is combined with a negation of its claims to objectivity. Making a connection between history and literature Edouard Glissant comments: "The surface effects of literary realism are the precise equivalent of the historian's claim to pure objectivity" (74). Glissant's theoretical pronouncements on the subject echo, in many ways, Derek Walcott's views in "The Muse of History." Walcott makes a similar comparison, "the method by which we are taught the past, the progress from motive to event, is the same by which we read narrative fiction." Both writers spell out the consequences of such a reading of history in very similar terms:

In the New World servitude to the muse of history has
produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a
literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or
a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters.
(Walcott, "MH" 39)

We can be the victims of History when we submit passively to it--never managing to escape its harrowing power. History (like Literature) is capable of quarrying deep within us, as a consciousness or the emergence of a consciousness, as a neurosis (symptom of loss) and a contraction of the self. (Glissant 70)

The effects of submission to history are pointed out by both writers: the "recrimination and despair" of the victim spoken of by Walcott is like the "passive" submission which Glissant mentions. These adjectives suggest a torpor and inaction which in its futility is quite like the sound and fury of those who perceive an affirmation of identity to lie in their dismissal of all colonial influences including language. Searching for an alternative tradition they become, in Walcott dismissive words, "the new magnifiers of Africa." This phrase immediately brings to my mind Brathwaite's work. You are already aware of the importance accorded to African traditions by him. For Walcott history "begins" not "ends" with the arrival of migrants rather than European discoverers in the New World. When Brathwaite discusses the African base of Caribbean folk culture or the African presence in Caribbean literature it does seem that he posits Africa as the teleological origin of this region's culture. This view would ignore the cultures of other ethnicities: Amerindian, European, East Asian, Chinese. When one remembers that it is this diversity which Walcott celebrates as "fragments of an epic memory" in his Nobel lecture, his position on the foundations of Caribbean history seems diametrically opposed to Brathwaite's stand on it. Brathwaite's early writings on history and culture are characterised by a distinctly African orientation. *The Development of Creole Society in America* is about the inter-culturation of West African slaves and in part also deals with European adaptations to this "creole" culture. So in its focus on "two cultures": African and European and their interaction Brathwaite's account can be critiqued on the grounds of ignoring Amerindian influence on creolization. Brathwaite's work is not caught in the despair-recrimination pattern Walcott outlines. And in later essays he has acknowledged the role of other ethnicities on the culture of the Caribbean. *The Arrivants* trilogy is heavily influenced by the author's historical research. An interaction between the two disciplines has, in Brathwaite's poetry, produced a rejection of the "idea of history as time for its original concept as myth, the partial recall of a race" (Walcott "MH"). So you can see that starting from contradictory positions on history, Brathwaite and Walcott's positions on its uses in literature are not very different.

Another Caribbean writer who has written extensively on this issue is George Lamming who, like Walcott and Glissant, forwards the idea of history as the discourse of the powerful. Discrediting the concept of discovery Lamming writes:

The early European arrivals may look very heroic for what they did. . . . Yet the history of their arrival has been reconstructed in very strange ways, such that there is no greater collection of lies than what has been written about it. Columbus's journal speaks about meeting a Caribbean aboriginal on arrival and conversing with him. Yet, as far as I know, Columbus spoke not a word of any aboriginal Caribbean language, and the aboriginal spoke neither Italian nor Spanish; it is peculiar that they could understand each other: what Columbus really did was to create what he ordered, because he represented power. (Lamming, "Concepts" 2)

This has been supported by discursive analyses of Columbus's journals which Peter Hulme has called "by turns a personal memoir, an ethnographic notebook, and a compendium of European fantasies about the Orient: a veritable palimpsest" (367). It contains two distinct discursive networks, a "discourse of Oriental civilization" and a "discourse of savagery." Following Foucault's theories and Said's application of them commentaries like Lamming's and Hulme's have been useful in dis-covering the

assumptions which govern colonial historiography based on accounts like Columbus's journal. Unreliability is embedded in these narratives or as Walcott puts it, history is fiction subject to a "fitful muse, memory." This effectively puts to rest any claims to objectivity and 'truth value.' These insights can be used to study the textuality of history as well as the historicity of texts. Many Caribbean authors draw on historical events for their poetry, prose, drama or criticism. An examination of the sources used, the aspects foregrounded, their choice of genre, the authorial agenda and effective impact can be made to see in what way the work, whether critical or creative, contributes to the revisionist historiographical impulse of new historicism.

6.2 INTERTEXTUALITY

A revisionist agenda is based on the assumption that no text is self-referential. The inter-relationships between various systems of signs and the transposition of one or several of these systems into another is intertextuality at its broadest level. In practice it has always been a part of the production of textuality. Consciously or unconsciously the writer absorbs something from the world and other literary and non-literary texts. Thus many works use historical, political or cultural intertexts. The term was coined by Julia Kristeva in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in which she said, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). The concept has been further elaborated upon by Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette and Michael Riffaterre.

As has already been indicated in the analysis of Derek Walcott's poetry, many post-colonial writers are using canonical European works as intertexts to subvert colonial discourse and cultural stereotyping. Helen Tiffin calls this "canonical counter-discourse." This project, according to her, involves an investigation of European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space and an intervention in that originary and continuing containment (97). The examples she gives are those of Jean Rhys writing back to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Samuel Selvon to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in *Moses Ascending*. Besides these other Caribbean authors have also used the figure of Crusoe and characters from Shakespeare's plays. In what follows I will explicate this by referring to Miranda from the much reworked play *The Tempest* and to Othello, the "noble Moor" who is the protagonist in Shakespeare's play of the same name.

As the original inhabitant of the island, which Prospero claims as his, Caliban is the colonised native. Prospero's daughter Miranda is silently complicitous in the project of colonisation. The focus of reworkings of this play has been on the self-Other duality of Prospero-Caliban and on the question of the former's language being imparted to and acquired by the latter. In Shakespeare's play Miranda is presented as an object of desire: illegitimate in the case of Caliban and legitimate when Ferdinand woos her. In David Dabydeen's poem "Miranda" a "black bony peasant" fantasises about her but in curiously asexual terms. This is Dabydeen's transformation of the monstrous Caliban whose attempt to rape Miranda invites Prospero's wrath. Here the peasant's dream of Miranda as a maternal figure is the colonial "fantasy" of attachment to and sustenance from the imperial mother, England. She is,

Sea blue and bountiful
Beyond supplication or conquest
A frail slave vessel wracked upon a mere pebble of her promise
And the sun resumed its cruelty
And the sun shook with imperial glee
At the fantasy.

(Heinemann 64)

Dabydeen has, in this poem, made a political statement about the exploitation of colonies through the figure of Miranda.

Michael Gilkes in *Prospero's Island* juxtaposes the activities of Ferdinand and Miranda in poems which are titled on their names. The oppositional terms in which

they are described is the reason/imagination, culture/nature, male/female binarism. Ferdinand arrives on the island with his scientific vision and instruments and becomes the "cosmic cartographer" of this New World. Miranda's life on the island with its daily routine of "sand to be swept,/ firewood to fetch" subverts an Edenic view of the island. Her routine is not conducive to the exercise of the imagination:

But mind, her mind has mountains
where deep forests grow,
liana-hung:
another Eden where, as yet,
no bird has sung.

(Arnold Anthology 556)

In this poem too Miranda is a maternal presence. It is she who comforts Caliban "when he screams" out of fear of the storms at sea. Gilkes establishes Miranda in quintessentially idealised feminine terms. Her appearance has the perfection of girls on tourist brochures; her domestic instincts are manifested in daily chores and taking care of Caliban. Gilkes has at once recuperated Miranda from her role as complicit coloniser in Shakespeare's play and positioned her as entrapped in gender based stereotypical representations.

Sylvia Wynter's afterword, intended as a conclusion to a collection on essays on Caribbean women and literature, interprets this figure from the point of view of metropolitan versus third world feminist discourse. Published in 1990 this essay is titled "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman.'" The "theory speak" of this essay does not make easy reading. Broadly Wynter suggests that the play shows "a mutational shift from the primacy of the *anatomical* model of sexual difference . . . to that of the *physiognomic* model of racial/cultural difference" (Reader 477). What this means is that there is a substitution of the woman as Other to that of the native as Other. Caliban's physiognomically complementary mate whom Wynter calls "Caliban's Woman" is conspicuous by her absence. This silencing of the "native" woman enables "the partial liberation of Miranda's hitherto stifled speech" (478) and is symptomatic of the power structures inherent in feminist discourse in which the Euro-American intelligentsia dominates and suppresses the discourse of Caribbean and other third world feminists. It is this "demonic ground" which Wynter strives to recover by pointing out Miranda's unsilencing at the expense of Caliban's Woman.

Another instance of canonical counter-discourse evolving a critical paradigm is to be found in Caribbean born British author Caryl Phillips's formulation based on what he perceives to be Othello's function in the Shakespearean play. His work *The European Tribe* has a chapter on Othello, "A Black European Success," which deals with the options for a black person from the colonies who has been made or shaped in the developed world. Othello is a moor in the service of the Venetian state and is made commander of the forces against Cyprus. Phillips comments that the figure of the black person of African origin who is used as a weapon against non-Europeans begins with the figure of Othello (191). Relating this to the hegemonic desire of co-opting black people in a struggle against other black people, he sees this as symptomatic of insecurity at the heart of the hegemonic power (192). Like Caliban, Prospero, Crusoe and Bertha Mason the figures of Miranda and Othello have been used anew to raise gender and racial construction with reference to power relations. Intertextuality in its specific form of canonical counter-discourse is pan-generic. Besides fiction, poetry and drama the scholarly critical essay is another important site from which post-colonial literatures actively engage with Western literary forms of representation. The subversive implications of such an engagement can be spelt out in an analysis of the intertext vis-a-vis the literary or critical text.

6.3 ORALITY

add computers to this list) as the age of "secondary orality." It depends on writing and print for its existence and in it orality and literacy exist synchronically (2-3). The Caribbean cultural scenario with an interweaving of high and popular culture exhibits what Viv Edwards and Thomas Seinkewicz call the "oral-literate continuum." This continuum recognizes the skills of the oral performer and at the same time does not view literate people as hopelessly cut off from oral skills. Sometimes this is perceived as a divide rather than a continuum then the oral/literary polarity is the creole/English debate outlined in Unit 1. Ong expands the term "verbomotor" first used by Jousse to include all cultures that retain enough oral residue to remain significantly word-attentive in a person-interactive context (67). The calypso with its disputed status as oral poetry is perhaps the most important popular cultural form to emerge out of the Caribbean which illustrates this word-attentiveness.

The origins and subversive satirical effects of calypsos have been spelt out in the discussion on Walcott's poem "The Spoiler's Return." I will here focus on how expressions of popular culture like the calypso thematise the oral/literary polarity. The famous calypso "Dan is the Man in the Van" sung by Mighty Sparrow - he was crowned calypso king four times and was involved in a song feud lasting several months with Lord Melody - outlines this theme. In it a sustained attack is mounted on Cutteridge's *West Indian Readers*, a six-volume textbook widely used in the Caribbean for three decades:

The poems and the lessons they write and send from
England
Impress me they were trying to cultivate comedians
Comic books made more sense
You know it was fictitious without pretence
But like Cutteridge wanted to keep us in ignorance.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty did fall
Goosey Goosey Gander
Where shall I wander
Ding dong dell . . . Pussy in the well
RIKKI . . . TIKKI TAVI
Rikki Tikki Tavi

(Reader 161)

The English nursery rhymes mentioned in the above passage, meant to be memorised and narrated by children, were transcribed in Cutteridge's *Reader* for the education of Caribbean children. The oral is inscribed or as the calypsonian says "written" not with the purpose of imparting knowledge or education but "to keep us in ignorance." Children learning these in schools would, according to Sparrow, grow up to be "damn fool[s]." Sparrow prioritises street smartness and verbal dexterity above a conventional colonial education which has no connection with the Caribbean ethos. The hierarchy of the oral/scrabal he establishes is discussed by Brathwaite under the concept and use of the word as revealing itself in "our love of courtroom scenes (both factual and fictional), the rhetoric of yard quarrels, 'word throwings,' tea-meetings and preacher/political orations. The whole tradition of the calypso is based on it" ("African Presence" 240).

The social, communal occasions detailed by Brathwaite attest to the *copia* and agonistic tonality of oral cultures. The calypso relies on repetitive rhythms and competitions in the form of verbal battles are often a source of enjoyment for the public. However with the increasing trans-cultural popularity of Carnival celebrations the calypso form has been appropriated so that it now owes its popularity more to chirographic (written) and secondary oral sources. The publication of "Dan is the Man" in the *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* is a case in point. Record labels vie with each other to offer contracts to calypsonians some of whom have become internationally known.

Myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles which form an inextricable element of the folk culture carry the traces of a primary oral culture with no knowledge of the written word. Their being used in literary and secondary oral forms, much like the calypso, suggests Caribbean culture's embeddedness in orality. Fiction has drawn heavily on folkloric figures by investing characters with some of their features. Oral forms of expression, be it the calypso or an Anancy folktale, is often used as an intertext by Caribbean writers. Probably an interpretative paradigm based on an oral aesthetic can discuss the transformation of orality in the contemporary context.

6.4 DIASPORA

The diasporic approach to Caribbean literature expressed in critical essays from the turn of the century has drawn on metaphors for interpretation. Whereas the work of post-colonial migrant intellectuals like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Salman Rushdie can prove useful in analysing diasporic literary production in general, one must not forget that Caribbean intellectuals at home and abroad have provided their own interpretative models. Bhabha speaks of the "*metaphoricity* of the peoples of imagined communities - migrant or metropolitan" in "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation." "Their metaphorical movement," according to him, "requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic" (141). This doubleness or their positioning at the interstices of culture is a major theme in literature of the diaspora. In my account of this literature I shall try to show how this metaphoricity has been itself theorised through metaphor by Caribbean writers.

The situation in the Caribbean is more complicated than those of other post-colonial societies with a significant migrant population in metropolitan centres of power. As Stuart Hall has explained, the New World presence is itself the beginning of diaspora, diversity, hybridity and difference, making the Afro-Caribbean people already a part of the diaspora (401). Hall's statement can be extended to include people of all ethnicities in the Caribbean except the Amerindians who are natives of the region. Hall defines the diaspora experience as the "recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity.

... a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite difference, by *hybridity*" (402). Since this is by now a commonplace of literary theory one might miss its metaphoricity if one forgets that literally the word diaspora refers to those scattered tribes whose identity can be secured in relation to some sacred homeland. You can see for yourself the similarity between Bhabha's and Hall's formulations: both point out the inbetween-ness of the diasporic experience and see it as an enabling position.

As early as 1957 Edward Brathwaite had said, "the desire (even the need) to migrate is at the heart of West Indian sensibility-whether that migration is in fact or by metaphor" ("Sir Galahad" 7). Brathwaite traces the theme of emigration and/or escape in Caribbean writing as far back as C.L.R. James's *Minty Aley* (1936) and Alfred Mendes's *Black Fauns* (1935). He suggests that it is both the perceived cultural and actual material poverty of the islands that makes authors explore this theme. A way out of this would be to establish connections with the folk culture which can enrich the writer's imagination and establish his (Brathwaite uses the masculine pronoun throughout the essay and discusses only male authors) rootedness in the very culture he desires to escape from. Galahad of Samuel Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* is the figure Brathwaite uses to metaphorically delineate this situation. He concludes that only when the writer gains a sense of community "will Sir Galahad be able to turn and attempt to return to his own native society" ("Sir Galahad" 207). Galahad, the eternal quester of Thomas Malory's *The Death of King Arthur*, transformed to the migrant individual by Selvon becomes, in Brathwaite's essay, the author internally (metaphorically) or externally (spatially) exiled from the islands.

George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* published in 1960 is a non-fictional work about "the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial and exile, from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of Prospero's and his language" (Lamming, *Arnold Anthology* 482). In the same work he has described subjective experiences of migration including his own. He has also spoken of the material impact of this move in terms of publication opportunities for writers and their "hunger for recognition." These imperatives constitute the "pleasure and paradox" of exile, a condition in which the creative imagination continues to be nourished by the place of origin even while acknowledging the possible gains of being situationally, albeit not socially or culturally, metropolitan. More recently Lamming has again spoken of the Caribbean presence in North America and Europe in terms of the metaphorical usage of "frontier," literally meaning the borders of civilization. Whereas colonial history posited the idea of the Caribbean as an imperial frontier, Lamming forwards the idea of the Caribbean presence in cities like Amsterdam, Paris, London, Birmingham, New York and other parts of North America as making these centres into an "external frontier." Reversing the centre-periphery hierarchy Lamming has, in a sense, made the erstwhile centre the outpost or the frontier of a culture originating in the Caribbean ("Concepts" 9). An almost similar overturning of the materially exploitative aspects of colonialism is outlined in Louise Bennett's poem "Colonisation in Reverse":

What a joyful news, Miss Mattie;
Ah feel like me heart gwine burs-
Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in reverse.

By de hundred, by den tousan,
From country and from town,
By de ship-load, by de plane-load,
Jamaica is Englan boun.

(*Hinterland*, 62)

The above lines express, in nation language, the immigrants arrival to England as a historical revenge. In the same poem she goes on to describe how a woman on dole passes her days, not searching for a job as she is supposed to, but reading "love-story book[s]." A significant Caribbean presence in England has led to British-born or British-based writers of Caribbean descent to be labelled as "Black British," a term which has been rejected by some who are included in it. Some of these are the poets Linton Kwesi Johnson, David Dabydeen, Jean 'Binta' Breeze and Grace Nicols. Within the last few years many anthologies of their work, like the one from which the above lines are taken, have appeared.

The Caribbean authors you have read about in this course: Naipaul, Walcott and Brathwaite are also a part of the Caribbean diaspora. Most of their literary activity has been carried out away from the Caribbean and their works are now published by foreign rather than local publishers. It would be a valuable research exercise to examine whether their later works differ significantly from their early work in keeping with their almost confirmed diasporic status.

6.5 LET US SUM UP

I have attempted to point out a few of the myriad possible approaches to Caribbean literature. This is by no means an exhaustive account and can be supplemented by, for instance, forms of popular culture like music and dance which have been appropriated to analyse literature. Brathwaite's use of the Jazz aesthetic to interpret fiction and Wilson Harris's account of the limbo imagination originating in a popular dance form are only two of many other paradigms. Due to constraints of space and because I have dealt with the connection between music and poetry in previous units I have not outlined these in this unit. However, you can read about them in the books mentioned in the reading list. It would be a fruitful endeavour for you to choose a

poem from the ones you have studied and try to apply more than one of the paradigms suggested here and any other you can think of to appreciate the eclecticism of Caribbean poetry.

6.6 QUESTIONS

- Q.1 Suggest any two possible ways of looking at the use of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* in Caribbean literature
- Q.2 Spell out the implications of the use of metaphors as frames of interpretation.
- Q.3 In what way has modern critical theory facilitated our understanding of literature from erstwhile colonised regions like the Caribbean?

6.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

Primary Material

Thieme, John. Ed. *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Arnold, 1996.

Secondary and Theoretical Material

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