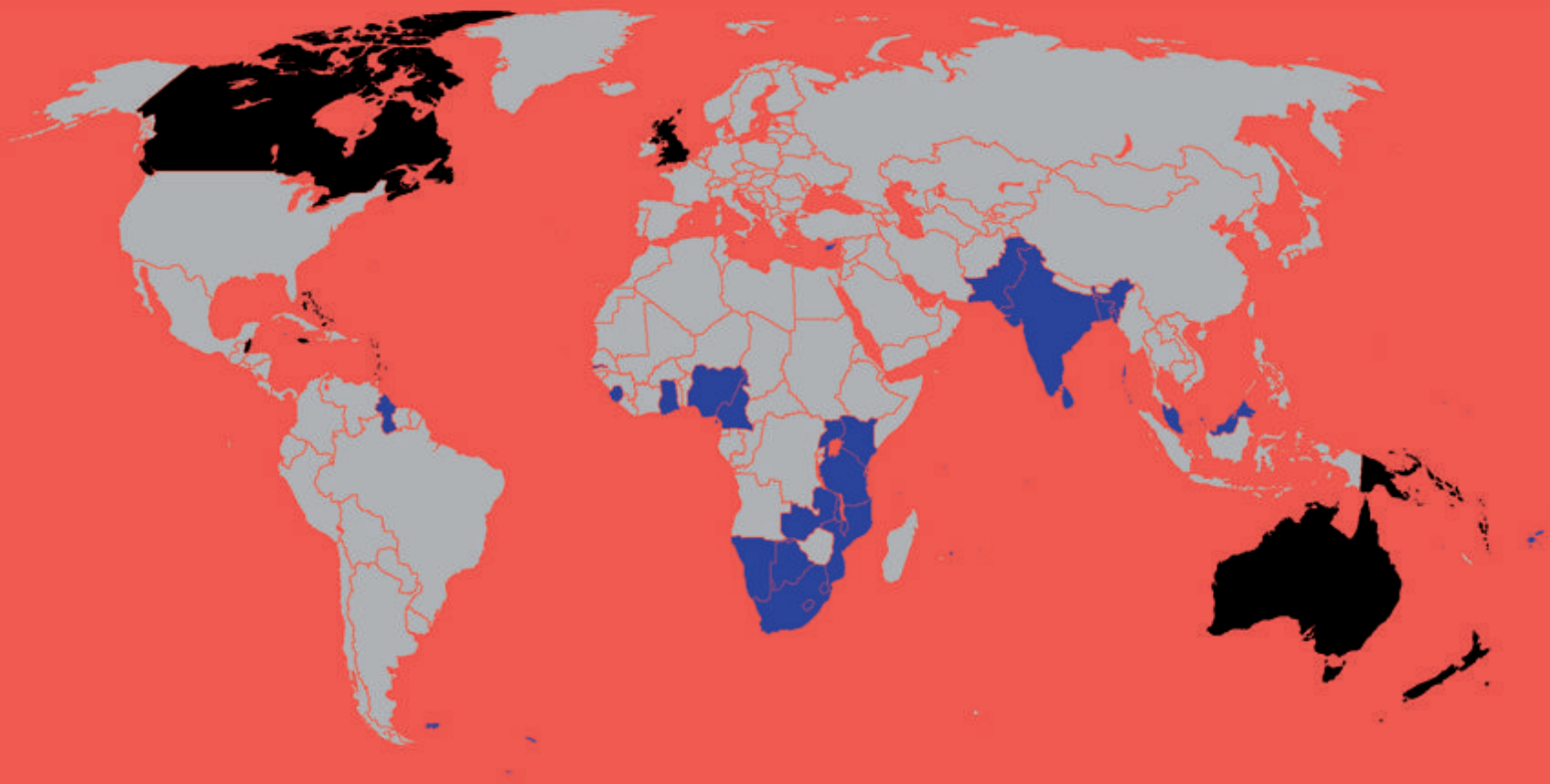


Sarah ANYANG AGBOR

Critical Perspectives on Commonwealth Literature



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**CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON
COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE**

Sarah ANYANG AGBOR

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Sarah Anyang Agbor

DEDICATION

To Abel Mbivaghan Anyang and Mary Eyongaka Anyang
My parents - I couldn't have chosen better.

And to the students of Commonwealth Literature at the
University of Yaoundé 1 - who inspired this book.

FOREWORD

Critical Perspectives on Commonwealth Literature provides an invaluable insight into some of the major issues in the field of literary studies in general, and Commonwealth Literature in particular. The focus on Commonwealth is perhaps justified by the protracted debate on the basic conceptual definition of what Commonwealth literature *is*, or what constitutes Commonwealth Literature, its origin, growth and development, its engaging topicalities, and location within the wider circle of postcolonial literature. These and other fundamental matters relating to Commonwealth literary study are addressed in this book. Although the original intention of the author was to make the book serve as an introductory course book for students of Commonwealth Literature, and as such, serve as a reference material and a guide to beginners in Commonwealth Literature study, its scope which touches on so many issues that apply to and influence Commonwealth literary productions, is capable of furthering research purposes, especially in Commonwealth Literature. This is because the author deliberately provides a launching pad for theoretical experimentation, by way of using existing theories that best apply to this brand of literature. Again, one is intrigued by her proposal on the possibility of evolving enduring Commonwealth literary canons.

It is my hope that *Critical Perspectives on Commonwealth Literature* will serve as a stimulus that generates the right interest of students, scholars, etc., in Commonwealth Literature as a field of study, in particular, and Postcolonial Literature in general.

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INTRODUCTION

The absorption of ‘Commonwealth’ and ‘Postcolonial’ Literatures into the academic canon necessitates scholarship in the various literary representations. This comparative study of topical issues in Commonwealth Literature introduces Commonwealth Literature by defining and discussing Commonwealth Literature; its historical development and various thematic preoccupations of commonwealth writers. It also shows how these writers from the Commonwealth represent the realities of their own space in history. Despite differences of language and background, Commonwealth writers from Africa, Caribbean, Canada, Australia, and India have much in common.

The definition of what constitutes or should constitute Commonwealth Literature is part of an ongoing debate whose breadth encompasses language and colonial experience. The appellation “Commonwealth” is generally used to refer to the Commonwealth of Nations, which means the conglomeration of Britain and its former colonies. The appellation ‘Commonwealth Literature’ seems to suggest a sort of homogenous literature produced in Commonwealth nations. Such an impression, though not altogether irrelevant, can be misleading because while the Commonwealth of Nations is more of a political organisation whose membership today transcends a British colonial background, “Commonwealth Literature” is a term applied fundamentally to writing from Britain and its former colonies. Yet, the definition of what constitutes Commonwealth Literature is far less simple and defies any such generalisations because British colonies can be divided into settler (Canada, Australia), semi-settler (South

Africa, Zimbabwe) and non-settler (India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon) countries.

The definition by a British colonial experience is thus a limiting one as it precludes such countries as New Zealand, Canada, and Australia (settler colonies) whose experience of colonialism is a far cry from the master/servant, self/other setup of British colonies in Africa, India and the Caribbean. Significantly, countries like Canada and Australia are sometimes omitted from the category of Commonwealth Literature because of their relatively shorter struggle for independence, their loyalty to the mother country and the absence of problems of racism or the imposition of a foreign language as was the case in India and Africa. A common denominator of Commonwealth Literature, however, seems to be the English language; a feature which in turn opens the wider debate on whether translated texts even from former British colonies can constitute Commonwealth Literature. Furthermore, should Commonwealth Literature be defined by history or by language and thematic concerns, the significant variations in the nature of British influence between Canada, Australia, South Africa and the rest of the non-settler colonies would expunge the ‘common’ in Commonwealth literature and dissolve it into the wider field of postcolonial literature.

The definition of Commonwealth Literature proffered herein is basically a synthesis of the enduring debate as it traces its roots in the origin and development of the Commonwealth of Nations and Commonwealth Literature through the contemporary reality of this category of writing. The concept of Commonwealth Literature as developed in this book transcends the sometimes unconscious tendency implying that “all authors can be neatly tied either culturally or personally to their countries of origin” (O’Reilly 10). It shows

that Commonwealth Literature, while being unique in its history and development as well as in its thematic concerns is also international (global) in scope, and this perhaps accounts for the conspicuous absence of a sense of origin in much of this writing.

This book, *Critical Perspectives on Commonwealth Literature* is primarily a response, but by no means limited, to these concerns. It is a comprehensive study guide not only for undergraduate and graduate students specialising in Commonwealth Literary Studies, but researchers in the field will equally find it an invaluable companion. The various chapters in the study elucidate and examine some thematic considerations of Commonwealth or Anglophone postcolonial writers. By incorporating the text-based, context-based and author-based analyses in our study, we contextualise it in terms of objective as well as mimetic criticisms.

The book comprises a careful selection of notable essays on Commonwealth Literature. These essays cover a wide range of controversial and topical issues of Commonwealth or Anglophone postcolonial writing from history and colonialism which is in every respect a frame of reference for much of this literature counter discourse which is basically a response to the colonial representation of the colonised; history, identity; gender and gender-related issues as well as the enduring debate on the place of language in this literature among others. These essays significantly draw from a cross-section of some of the most prominent names in the field of Commonwealth Literary studies; Salman Rushdie, VS. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Edward Kamau Braithwaite, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Derek Walcott, Isidore Okpewho, Buchi Emecheta, Michael Ondaatje, Yvonne Vera, Doris Lessing,

Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Nadine Gordimer, Jamaica Kincaid, Bate Besong and a host of others.

Chapter One entitled “Conceptual Definitions” focuses on some of the ambiguities that are related to the definition of the term, its scope, issues; who should be considered a Commonwealth writer and what literary genre is most representative. Commonwealth Literature has developed in different geographical, cultural, and political contexts and thus has become an international genre. Consequently, the chapter is posited on the hypothesis that although the label Commonwealth Literature appears to be a simple literary concept, there is nothing common about it. It is masked with a lot of contradiction because various issues in this domain mean different things to different critics.

Chapter Two captioned “Historical Development of Commonwealth Literature” provides some of the regions literary historical development. We focused on the historical development of Commonwealth Caribbean, Canadian, Australian, Indian and African literatures. The comparative slant offers an overview of each region’s literary development.

Chapter Three “Dissent in Commonwealth Literature” examines some of the dissenting views that are related to the concept “Commonwealth Literature”. Thus it is through such concerns as colonialism, history, racial constructions, counterdiscourses, and the problematic of neocolonial states, identity, gender, sexual orientation, class, disillusionment, representation, hybridity, and language amongst others, which characterise Commonwealth Literature amongst others that these dissents in Commonwealth Literature come to the fore. The dissent in Commonwealth Literature also arises from ideologies and historical circumstances of creative writers. While accepting that Commonwealth Literature is problematic,

it should however be noted that this is a reflection of the heterogeneous and often contradictory nature of human society.

Chapter Four entitled “History and Colonialism in Commonwealth Literature” discusses how Commonwealth texts and writers respond to British colonialism. History and colonialism are some of the common historical denominators of Commonwealth Literature thus we examine the various representations from Commonwealth Caribbean, Southern, West and East Africa. The question is how is this history created in the imaginative expression of the writers? Many of the writers revisit history as a ‘zone of imaginative recovery and recuperation’ in order to understand how the colonial and the early postcolonial period led to the present predicaments. Significantly, we came up with the conclusion that despite similar histories of colonialism there are significant and subtle variations between each novel. Many of the writers revisit history as a ‘zone of imaginative recovery and recuperation’ in order to understand how the colonial and the early postcolonial period led to the present predicaments.

Chapter Five entitled “Counter Discourse in Commonwealth Literature” is a broad range examination of the various responses Commonwealth Literature gives to the Western or colonial representation of the Orient. Colonial discourse basically (mis)construed the colonised as degenerates and denigrate types, a conception based on nothing beyond the racial factor that later shaped, and perhaps continues to shape, western ideology vis-à-vis the colonies or former colonies. The chapter makes a comparative analysis of the various works drawn from all the regions of the Commonwealth regions especially the non-settler colonies of Africa, India and the Caribbean; how the different authors re-present the image of the colonised, not as the stainless figure, but as being with its

own weaknesses which are no worse than those of the colonisers. In other words, the chapter appraises the different ways in which Commonwealth writers counter the colonised's misrepresentation in western texts not just through *vain* denial of the false racist identity they have been attributed but equally and more importantly through a vigorous assertion and reassertion of their cultural identity and a rewriting of their own history.

Chapter Six entitled "The Dialectics of Nationhood in Commonwealth Literature" addresses the question of nation and nationhood. The chapter examines the complexities and variables involved in the definition of the postcolonial nation within the framework of Commonwealth Literature. The modern Commonwealth nation is a post-independence construct forged from the marriage of sorts to which the pre-colonial nations were subjected by colonial regimes. However, that nation is now plagued by the reconstruction of ethnic, tribal and political barriers that render post-independence nations – or the existence of them – distractions of political rhetoric rather than the fruits of the promise that independence held.

Chapter Seven entitled "Language in Commonwealth Literature" deals with the never-ending debate on the language issue in African Literature. Language occupies a central place in the debate on Commonwealth studies. This is because during the colonial encounter, the colonisers imposed their language on the colonised people. Despite these shared experience of colonisation, the cultural realities of post colonial societies differ. While some critics are of the opinion that there should be a return to native languages, others believe that the colonial language (English in our case) provides a common ground. In the analysis we use a wide selection of different

texts and authors. Moreover, the use of language and form highlight the aesthetic dimension of Commonwealth Literature to its cultural, political, and ethical implications.

Chapter Eight entitled “Gender in Commonwealth Literature” highlights on Gender issues that continue to be topical in current literary discourse. This perhaps explains our focus on the relationship between culture and gender issues. We examined gender role stereotyping and the writers’ concern for the woman and her identity as defined by patriarchal society and her attempt to break free from that stifling patriarchal code. The chapter reveals a domain of discourse where the standard mode of gender role stereotyping is transgressed in order to question some longstanding patriarchal norms and values that stifle development. Some female and male writers reconstruct more “positive visioning of womanhood in the literature of modern Africa” (Catherine Schneider 49).

Chapter Nine entitled “Authorial Ideology in Selected Southern African Female Literature” “examines the authorial vision of selected Southern African female literature. The chapter highlights the consequences of Southern African historical reality and the contradiction segregation in southern Africa fiction. We discover that Doris Lessing, Bessie Head, and Pamela Jooste’s complex views of their society create differing interpretations and highlight their visions and significantly address the same issues but from different racial experience and the difference between one story and another is the writer’s vision.

Chapter Ten “Fictional Autobiography and Autobiographical Fiction in Commonwealth Literature” offers a comprehensive definition of the two genres through a succinct examination and analysis of their application in

literary discussion. It traces the etymology of autobiography and its early usages not just in the literary sphere but in history and other domains as well. This background information on the word enables us to give an informed definition of the word in contemporary usage. The definition of what constitutes fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction is given through an examination of the differences between the two, the most important of which rests on the role of the author and his/her active involvement in the one and utter absence in the other. The argument here does not remain at this abstract level but literary works that fall into either category are used to make the point. The study opines that Autobiographical fiction embodies a collective unconscious of the communities the various authors come from. On the other hand fictional autobiography is the personal writing about a significant event or period in the writer's life. Autobiographic memory is and imagination that comes alive in words.

Chapter Eleven "A Sociocultural Analysis of Isidore Okpewho's Novel *Call Me By My Rightful Name*" investigates the multicultural context of Isidore Okpewho's novel *Call Me by My Rightful Name* by examining how he reconstructs and represents the consequences of slavery and identity quest on Africans in the Diaspora. Sociocultural criticism shows how the novel embodies a cultural context, and how the events in the novel are influenced by the social conventions of its time. Thus the analysis examines the society and culture in *Call Me By My Rightful Name*, by assessing the social factors at work in the novel as well as the cultural elements present.

Chapter Twelve is entitled "An Analysis of Selected poems of Edward Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*". Edward Brathwaite poetry is located in the third phase of poetry that begun in the 1940s and 1960s. This period gave birth to modern

West Indian poetry. The chapter explores how Edward Braithwaite's collection of poems *The Arrivants* portrays the plight and experiences of the West Indians through the following themes, slavery, homelessness victimisation, disillusionment, and alienation. *The Arrivants* also celebrates some realities of African heritage from Ghana. The selected poems from *The Arrivants* are: "Tom", "All God's Chillun" "Postlude/Home", "Emigrants", "The Dust", "Sumsum", "Making of the Drum", "Tano", and "Negus".

As the chapters in this part demonstrate, there is dissent in Commonwealth Literature. We come to the conclusion that the collection of articles demonstrates that the dominant ideologies of the various societies consciously and unconsciously influence the representations in the novels, plays and poems. Some of the writers of Commonwealth Literature describe cultural, national, or historical loci, aspects of their various cultures. This accounts for the dissent in the literature. The writers deconstruct colonial, political and patriarchal paradigms to articulate the perspectives of the colonised, neocolonial masses and women. In other words, the term Commonwealth Literature has divergent perspectives.

To conclude, we can state with certainty that Commonwealth Literature is a discursive domain within which different voices contend with each other articulating varying and sometimes opposing views in their response to the parameters that may be used to define it. Some of these we have raised in this book are the controversy inherent in the term 'Commonwealth Literature' or 'Postcolonial Literature'. They defy any simple classification. Another is the question of authenticity, representation and identity of the writers, characters and world view as presented in this literature. Collectively, to some extent the articles gathered here demonstrate the dissenting views of Commonwealth literature as well as the thematic preoccupations of the novelists, and playwrights and poets.

CHAPTER ONE

Commonwealth Literature: A Conceptual Definition

What is Commonwealth?

The appellation 'Commonwealth' is generally used to refer to the Commonwealth of Nations, by which is meant the conglomeration of Britain and her former colonies. The Commonwealth of Nations, usually known as the Commonwealth and sometimes as the British Commonwealth, "is a voluntary association of 54 independent sovereign states (one of which is currently suspended) most of which are former British colonies (the exceptions being the United Kingdom itself and Mozambique, which was a Portuguese colony.)" ("Commonwealth of Nations". Par. 1). While Nelson Mandela was president of South Africa, he made a formal plea to members to include Mozambique because it played a major role in freeing South Africa from apartheid. The idea for the modern Commonwealth began in 1949 after India chose to become a republic while retaining its British ties. As many Asian and African states achieved independence during the 1940s, '50s and '60s, the organisation grew as a collective of sovereign states ("Commonwealth of Nations". Par. 1). Since then, many Caribbean and Pacific islands have become members. Membership is voluntary but each member state is expected to adhere to Commonwealth principles:

- The pursuit of international peace and order in support of the United Nations.
- The promotion of representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law.

- The recognition of racial equality and the need to combat racial discrimination and racial oppression.
- The disparities of wealth in societies. (“Commonwealth of Nations”. Par. 1)

The function of the group is to work together to improve the quality of life of their citizens and to help each other make their economies stronger. They also work towards agreement on international issues such as free trade, debt relief and battling terrorism. The summits, known as CHOGMS (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings), are held every two years. The Commonwealth is also active in education. Commonwealth education ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual interest. Hedley Bull informs that:

The central idea of the Commonwealth myth is that the Commonwealth combines the liberty of many states with the unity of one. That, in the event of a conflict between them, the unity of the Empire must give way to the liberty of its parts has been accepted in broad principle by British governments for the colonies of European settlement since the 1840’s) and for the Asian and African dependencies since 1947. (577)

The Commonwealth thus, becomes a miniature of the League of Nations and the United Nations. The Balfour Report of 1926 holds that “...the Commonwealth is “the League in practice” (General Smuts), “the United Nations in miniature” (Lord Attlee)” (Bull 578). Furthermore, it is the “unity of the Empire to reside in the powers of the Imperial government over the form of the Constitution, the disposal of waste lands, external trade, and foreign relations” (Bull 578). By the First World

War and during the war the imperial government “came to share this control with the Dominion and Indian governments” (ibid.). The term dominions was used to describe the “nations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa”(McLeod 9). These nations referred to as ‘settler’ nations consisted :

... of large European populations that had settled overseas , often violently displacing or destroying the indigenuos peoples of these lands - Native indians in Canada, Aboriginal communities in Australia and New Zealand, black African peoples in South Africa. The ‘settler’ peoples of these nations agitated for forms of self government which they achieved as dominions of the brish empire.(Ibid)

As dominions they still “pledged allegiance to the ultimate authority of Britain as the ‘mother country’” (9). McLeod further informs that they achieved political autonomy in the follwing other: Canada in 1867, Australia in 1900, New Zealand in 1907 and South Africa in 1909 (ibid). In the interwar period, the Dominions:

...assumed international personalities and to conduct foreign policies of their own; the Empire was no longer a single state, and its unity consisted in the substantial concurrence of different policies differently arrived at, in the existence of a “British Entente.” (578)

The London Declaration of 1949 was described as a “milestone on the road to developing the modern Commonwealth”. The Commonwealth membership was not only for countries “owing an allegiance to the Crown” as the Balfour Report had stated

because at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in 1949 this decision was revised. India's continued membership as a republic was accepted and recognised thus, paving the way for other newly independent states to join. At the same time, the word 'British' was dropped from the association's title to reflect the Commonwealth's changing character:

The first member to be ruled by an African majority was Ghana which joined in 1957. From 1960 onwards, new members from Africa, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the Pacific joined, increasing the diversity and variety that has enhanced the Commonwealth to this day. With its commitment to racial equality and national sovereignty, joining the Commonwealth became a natural choice for many new nations that were emerging out of the decolonisation process of the 1950s and 1960s. Since then, the Commonwealth has grown in size and shape, expanding its reach and range of priorities. It is now involved in a wide spectrum of activities, all feeding the greater goals of good governance, respect for human rights, and peace and co-operation in the member countries and beyond.
(par. 3)

It is this decolonisation process that gave birth to the Commonwealth of nations. Bull further observes that since the Second World War, this entente has ceased to be recognisable because:

The entry of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana, and Malaya into full membership has introduced a

division on the central issue of international politics, between those who adhere to the neutralist bloc and those who adhere to the Western: and it has brought into the sphere of Commonwealth relations two antagonisms characteristic of international politics, between India and Pakistan, and India and South Africa. And although Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Pakistan each belong to one or more of the Western alliance, their identity as a Commonwealth group has become submerged in the wider western system, and the source of their military unity is much less their Commonwealth relationship than the attraction exerted upon them all by the power of the United States; if a part of the Commonwealth marches in step, the beat is called by a country which is outside the Commonwealth. (578-9)

Today's Commonwealth is an association of 54 countries. It has nearly 2 billion citizens, about 30 per cent of the world's population, drawn from the broadest range of faiths, races, cultures and traditions.



What is Literature?

Before defining Commonwealth Literature, it is important we attempt a definition of Literature. What is literature? Literature does not have a specific definition because it is complex in nature and the term can be used to describe anything written. Literature comes from the Latin word “Litteraturae” (writings). The word has been used since the eighteenth century to “designate fictional and imaginative writings – poetry, prose (fiction) and drama” (M.H.Abram and Geoffrey Halt Harpham 152). In a larger sense it is used to describe other writings (-philosophy, scientific works, history) that “are especially distinguished in form, expression, and emotional power” (Abram and Harpham 153). Thus, Literature can be used to describe anything written whether imaginative, fictional, historical, scientific, political, biographical, religious or economic. It can be defined as a work of fiction influenced by the creative imagination of the writer or speaker. The writer of contemporary literature uses words to describe his/her feelings or experiences (which could be collective or personal). Thus, there are written and oral literature. Written literature is exemplified in stories, plays, poems that are generally fictional.

Oral tradition influences written literature. Lawrence Kolawole Alo defines oral tradition as a “term which applies to a process and its products. The products are oral messages based on previous oral information, passed down from generations past” (12). Thus in a traditional society literature is spoken. In traditional societies oral literature is exemplified in folklore: fables, myths, legends, proverbs, songs (songs of abuse, work songs, puberty rites, riddles, praise songs, marriage songs etc). Penny Van Toorn highlights the importance of oral tradition in traditional societies:

Oral songs and narratives are traditionally an embodied and emplaced form of knowledge. Information is stored in people's minds in various narrative forms, which, at the appropriate time, are transmitted from the mouths of the older generation to the ears of the young. (19)

In every traditional society moral education is passed by word of mouth. The different types of oral literature are used for definite purposes. Significantly, rituals, myths, legends, folklores, work songs, birth songs, dirges and marriage songs are forms of oral literature which embody the knowledge of the people, serve aesthetic and educational purposes. For example, divination poetry is used to heal and cure people. The imaginative aspect of literature does not take away the reality in the literature. Rather, literature offers an experience of life and conveys a feeling of a people through the organisation of words. Despite the fictional aspects of literature, it is an illustration of the beliefs, values and culture of a particular culture.

Conceptual Definition of Commonwealth Literature

The Literature of the British Dominions and Colonies are considered as Commonwealth Literature. The term "Commonwealth Literature" is, to say the least, an all too generalising categorisation. It presupposes, for instance, *a* literature as opposed to literatures, and by extension, a literature about a common cultural, historical, political or social experience such as we may talk of an American literature. However, although Commonwealth Literature may be *common* as far as the colonial experience of its producers is all linked to Britain – and that this experience constitutes a substantial part

of its major concerns – it is equally important to note that that common colonial heritage is about all that is common in Commonwealth Literature. In other words, the term Commonwealth Literature is largely misleading. As it were, the different regions of the commonwealth had different experiences and attitudes towards colonial rule and it is these experiences and attitudes that inform their literatures. It is therefore important to understand Commonwealth Literature as a literature that is made up of several literatures. It is from this perspective that we talk of West African Commonwealth Literature, Caribbean Commonwealth Literature, and South Asian Commonwealth Literature among others.

Can we refer to the writer who utilises subject matter outside the Commonwealth but writes in the English language as a Commonwealth writer or the literature as Commonwealth Literature? Can a Commonwealth writer be best described as Westerners or other non-Commonwealth writers who utilise the subject matter of Commonwealth nations in the English language? Salman Rushdie in “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist” states that many scholars admit that “the term ‘Commonwealth Literature’ was a bad one” (62). He explains that South Africa and Pakistan, “for instance, are not members of the Commonwealth, but their authors apparently belong to its literature” (62). This is understood because Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands* was published in 1991 before South Africa joined the Commonwealth, although many South African writers wrote originally in English. However Rushdie attempts a definition of Commonwealth Literature thus:

‘Commonwealth Literature’, it appears, is that body of writing created, I think, in the English language, by persons who are not themselves white

Britons, or Irish, or citizens of the United States of America. I don't know whether black Americans are citizens of this bizarre Commonwealth or not.
(63)

Yes, we agree that Commonwealth writers are writers “who are not themselves white Britons, or Irish, or citizens of the United States of America” but we would not say that the citizens are those of “this bizarre commonwealth”. Categorising people in different regions of the world on the basis of their colonial history should not be strange. We believe that we can further define a Commonwealth writer as the writer who utilises the English language to write about the regions of the Commonwealth and/or the writer who uses subject matters of former British colonies in the English language. The term ‘Commonwealth Literature’ will therefore be expected to mean the literature from her former colonies. Britain colonised America, however, the historical phenomenon of colonialism delineates America as a Commonwealth state. Christopher O'Reilly points out that “because of its power in world politics today and its displacement of native population”, America can be considered to defy this classification. Thus we find out that the term Commonwealth Literature is “resonant with all the ambiguity and complexity of many different cultural experiences it implicates” (92).

Furthermore, British colonies can be divided into settler (Canada and Australia) and non-settler countries (India and Jamaica, Nigeria etc). Countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe defy this simple classification because the colonial population partially settled there. However, the creative writing of Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders and Anglophone West Africans, East Africans, South Africans, India amongst

others will be considered to be Commonwealth Literature. For consideration as such, it must be originally written in English and not for example translations from French to English. We must reiterate that Commonwealth Literature like most literary works is fiction and it is not an accurate representation of the real world, no matter how convincing it might seem. It is in this wise that Elizabeth Ermath refers to literature as “a point of transition where facts and fiction or history and literature merge” (38).

Many Commonwealth writers (V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Caryl Phillips, Michael Ondaatje, Samuel Selvon, Buchi Emecheta, Isidore Okpewho, Jamaica Kincaid, Ngugi wa Thiong’o) are Diaspora writers and their literature dwells on former colonies of Britain and their movement to the motherland and the United States for greener pastures. It becomes difficult to argue that Commonwealth writers and Postcolonial writers are writers who live in and write about Commonwealth countries. In line with this, O’Reilly articulates that: “it would be a mistake to imply that all authors can be neatly tied either culturally or personally to their countries of origin” (10). This seems to account for the conspicuous absence of a sense of origin in the works of most of these writers, given that the scope of Commonwealth Literature is international rather than local. Evidence of this can be found in the lives and works of such writers as Salman Rushdie, V S Naipaul, Caryl Philips, Jamaica Kincaid, Buchi Emecheta, Yvonne Vera and Isidore Okpewho among others. Salim, the protagonist in Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River* is a Muslim of East African descent. Like the author, he was born in Trinidad of Hindu – Indian parents but has lived most of his life away from his birthplace (London, India and Africa). It therefore becomes difficult to identify such writing as African,

Caribbean or Commonwealth Literature. Like Naipaul, the Indian born British author Salman Rushdie does not fall into any of these categories because they live and write across regions. Therefore it poses a problem to describe their works as Indian, Caribbean or African.

V.S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Caryl Philips, Buchi Emecheta, Jamaica Kincaid, Samuel Selvon and Zakes Mda all live and write across national, cultural and ideological borders, they are best described as transcultural writers. To say that such works are Indian, Caribbean or African will depend on what emphasis the critic wants to make. As a direct consequence of this, their creative writings most often portray the themes of alienation, identity fragmentation, segregation, rootlessness and displacement. These themes characterise the situation of the protagonists of these literary texts. For example, Salim's family in *A Bend in the River* has lived in Africa for centuries and they regard themselves as people of Indian origin. Yet, when they compare themselves with Arabians, Indians or Persians, they felt like Africans. This too can be said of the Tutsis' in Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* who despite their stay in Trinidad still cling to their roots, their religious rites and family traditions. The constant search to assert themselves becomes a dominant theme in these works, making the characters to be in a constant search for "order in their world, looking for the center" (*Finding the Center* 3).

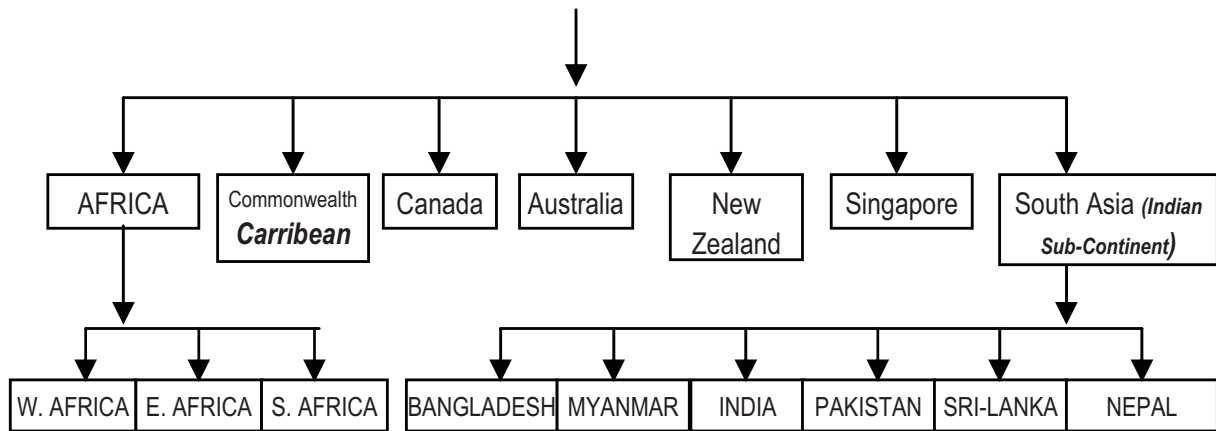
One thing we need to emphasise is that just as there are different regions in the Commonwealth, the experiences of Commonwealth writers depicted in their creative imagination are also diverse. Rushdie states at the Commonwealth Literature Conference that the differences between the writers "were so much more than our similarities, that it was impossible to say what "Commonwealth Literature"- the idea

which had, after all, made possible our assembly-might conceivably mean” (62). This is so because

Van Herk spoke so eloquently about the problem of drawing imaginative maps of the great emptinesses of Canada; Wilson Harris soared into metaphysical lyricism and high abstraction; Anita desai spoke in whispers, her novel the novel of sensibility, and I wondered what on earth she could be held to have in common with the committed Marxist Ngugi, an overtly political writer, who expressed his rejection of the English language by reading his own work in Swahili.... (62-63)

The above quotation demonstrates the diverse nature of Commonwealth Literature. In their creative works they represent different realities of their societies from different vantage points. Therefore, Literature offers one of the most important ways in which these former colonies express their perceptions and experience such that their socio-cultural, political, religious, economical and historical realities are profoundly represented. It is in this wise that Rushdie informs that Commonwealth Literature is a literature that expresses nationality. For example, V.S Naipaul’s literature expresses his West Indianness, Patrick White’s expresses his Australianess, and Doris Lessing’s her Africanness (Rushdie 67). This is so because Commonwealth Literature has developed in different geographical cultural and political contexts and thus has become an international genre. Since literature is subdivided into the following sub-genres: drama, poetry, prose and short stories, all these subgenres make up Commonwealth Literature.

COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE



The Functions of Commonwealth Literature

One of the functions of literature is that “it nourishes our emotional lives” (Michael Meyer 4). Michael Meyer emphasises:

An effective literary work may seem to speak directly to us, especially if we are ripe for it. The inner life that good writers reveal in their characters often gives us glimpses of some portion of ourselves... We can be moved to laugh, cry, tremble, dream, ponder, shriek, or rage with a character by simply turning a page instead of turning our lives upside down. Although the experience itself is imagined, the emotion is real. (4)

From the experiences of the characters, we sometimes identify with the flow of emotions. That is why sometimes while reading a play, poem, story or watching a bard recites a story we weep, we laugh, we shriek etc. For example, the rape of Martine in Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The

experience and dialogue of Makak in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* act as a satirical comic. Each work of art in Africa does not exist for art's sake but always carries some kind of message, protest or commitment. This makes it functional.

Moreover, one of the functions of literature is to assert the very rich diversified culture and history of a writer's text and context. Early African writers were committed to asserting the African past which colonialism had destroyed or misrepresented. They took upon themselves the responsibility to rewrite the image of Africa that had been presented as derogatory in every aspect e.g. *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. This is very evident in the works of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. They sought to demonstrate that the African had a culture and a personality he should be proud of. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Chinua Achebe writes: "Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of the word" (44). *Things Fall Apart* demonstrated a society that was orderly, stable, peaceful and civilized before the white man came. The goal of this was to assert the culture of the African.

Oral literature, especially in Africa, was widely used for entertainment as well as for education. Ibrahim Kashim Tala in *The Oral Tale in Africa*, makes this point when he states that "the oral tale was used by the community to teach, to entertain, and to explore the ambiguities of life" (72). Nol Alembong also declares that "our folktales, legends and myths... teach us the virtues of love, kindness, obedience, fidelity, gratitude, hard work, heroism, spiritual sanctity, etc." To him, our folklore is used for "social regulation and control" (*Epasa Moto* 122). In the same vein, Penny Van Toorn attests that "In remote

communities in central and northern Australia, traditional oral narratives and songs continue to be a primary means of preserving and transmitting knowledge of country, spiritual belief, language, kinship, history and practical skills”(20). Oral as well as written literature, therefore, has always been functional. This is even more evident in Africa as seen in postcolonial African Commonwealth Literature.

Commonwealth Literature like most literatures widens our horizon about the world. Through novels, plays and poems and short stories, we come into contact with the experiences of many other peoples across Commonwealth nations. In “The Writer as Visionary” Bole Butake emphasises the primordial role that every artist must play in order to be useful to himself and his society:

The writer has a moral duty to steer members of his society along a course that ensures the triumph of truth and justice for all... and also to steer society away from corruption, greed, injustice along a course that will vindicate truth and justice. The writer as visionary and combatant must know everything or as much as possible about his people. This is the only avenue by which he can clearly decipher their aspirations and so help in charting a course for the realisation and fulfilment of these in their lives. (23-25)

In exposing the ills of their society, Commonwealth writers satirise the unpopular manifestations in their society in order to educate the populace. In this light Terry Eagleton in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, concludes that:

Literature, by forcing us into a dramatic awareness of language refreshes the habitual responses and renders objects more perceptible. By having to grapple with language in a more strenuous, self-conscious way than usual, the world, which that language contains, is vividly renewed. (41)

Thus, from these texts our horizons about the world, different cultures socio-cultural, historical and political, religious and economic realities of various regimes are widened. It is in this light that Meyer states “Literature allows us to move beyond the inevitable boundaries of our own lives and culture because it introduces us to people different from ourselves, places remote from our neighbourhoods, and times other than our own” (4). For example a reading of Southern African Literature from writers like Doris Lessing (*The Grass is Singing*), Nadine Gordimer (*July’s People, None to Accompany me*), Athol Fugard (*Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*), Yvonne Vera (*Nehanda and Butterfly Burning*), Tsitsi Dangarembga (*Nervous Conditions*), Bessie Head (*Maru and When Rain Clouds Gather*), J.M. Coetzee (*Disgrace and Waiting For the Barbarians*), and poets like Dennis Brutus (“Letters to Martha”, “Siren, knuckles and Boots”) and a host of others give us an understanding of the realities of Apartheid, oppression, victimisation and segregation in the Southern African region of the Commonwealth.

Tala Kashim in *New Horizon* stresses the importance of a literary work to the people as follows:

As long as there are individuals invested with vision, courage, drive, and intellectual power, there is always the hope that such individuals will one-day

change the direction of history and end the oppression of the majority by a minority and or vice versa. (23)

Thus, a piece of literature emotionally and intellectually educates us about the world around us emotionally and intellectually.

Moreover through a careful reading of a text, literature sharpens our analytical sensibilities. Many critics have stated the functional role of literature. Chidi Amuta in *The Theory of African Literature*, states that:

Literature is a major instrument for the sharpening and mobilising social consciousness and hence remained adoptive in the pursuit or negation of qualitative change. It can then be used as an instrument for subverting or preserving existing order. (45)

In a similar vein, Jean Paul Sartre in *What is Literature?* defines the role of literature as that which strives to positively change the world as opposed to its “syncretic” role which simply offers an explanatory view of the world. In his scholarly work, *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi asserts that:

Literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural, and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battlefield: the side of the

people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics. (xvi)

What this means is that a text view is partial in the sense that a writer's perception is influenced by the realities around him and he /she takes a position consciously or unconsciously. That is why new historicists examine the relationship between literature and political and economic power structures in a society. A student cultivates a good sense of reasoning; questions some of the issues and attempts a response to some of the issues raised in the text. Sylvan Barnet et al write "one of the things literature does is to make us see – hear, feel, love – what the author thinks is a valuable part of the experience of living"(5). It is important to note that a literary work has "an evaluative as well as descriptive function. So that its proper use has become a matter of contention" (Abrams and Harpham 153). The purpose of these forms of literature is to entertain and educate.

Like most literatures, Commonwealth Literature seeks to offer its readers fictions, which have been created and are not accurate representations of the real world, no matter how convincing they might seem. This literature is in the words of Elizabeth's Ermath "a point of transition where facts and fiction or history and literature merge" (38). New historicist critics assume that works of literature both influence and are influenced by historical reality. They say literature is a text of referentiality, that is, literature both refers and is referred to by things outside it. New Historicists argue that: "Literature is historical... Literature must be assimilated to history" (G.D.

Myers *The Literary Project* 6). To them the relationship between history and literature is seen as dialectic.

Differences between Commonwealth Literature and Postcolonial Literature

It is observed that students sometimes use the two terms, Commonwealth Literature and Postcolonial Literature synonymously. Postcolonial Literature is a broader term. Many critics such as Chatterjee (1979), Darby (1997), Castellino (2000), have adopted the term post-colonial to characterise concerns in fields ranging from politics and sociology to anthropology and economic theory. Anne McClintock has suggested that:

Metaphorically, the term post-colonial marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from the “pre-colonial”, to “the colonial”, to the “post-colonial” – an unbidden, if disavowed commitment to linear time and the idea of development”. (1995:10-11) (qtd in *The Empire Writes Back* 195-96).

Consequently, we find that even the term ‘postcolonial’ refers to a lot more than what is “post” colonial given that the various phases of Commonwealth Literature include pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial works. In the general introduction to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, the term post-colonial is used to address all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning to the end of colonial contact” (2). The definitions share a similar view of the term post-colonial as they all refer to the term from the perspective of the periods before, during and after colonisation.

Post-colonial Literature as a group of study involves a reading of all formerly colonised societies by the European powers like Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain amongst others. It incorporates all post colonial societies that have been colonised whether by Britain, Portugal, France, Germany, Spain, etc. Significantly, any text that is written from “a place implicated in colonial history, by a person whose access to language has colonial associations is postcolonial” (Rajeev S Patke 4). Edward O. Ako in “From Commonwealth to Post colonial Literature”:

The term “postcolonial” not only encompasses a wider field geographically in ways that the term “commonwealth” does not, since it deals with a re-reading of English, French and American canonical texts, the literatures of Africa, India and the West Indies etc, as well as the problems of gender, caste and class as they are posed in these societies and are represented textually. (14)

But Commonwealth writings and publications are recognised from former colonies of Britain and came after many of these Commonwealth nations achieved independence.

Commonwealth Literature is the regional literature: Africa (East, Southern and West) Australian, Canada, West Indian, South Asia, and New Zealand amongst others. Thus Commonwealth Literature becomes a sub under Postcolonial Literature. So we find writings from some nations in the region of West, East and Southern Africa. Other countries that produced Commonwealth Literatures include the Caribbean (British /Anglophone), Australia, Canada, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, New Zealand, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Malta,

and South Pacific Island countries. The United States of America is excluded from Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures because of her “current position of power, and the neo-colonial role it has played” (Ashcroft et al 2).

Some critics like Helen Tiffin in “Postcolonial Literature and Counter Discourse” refer to Commonwealth Literature as “New Writings in English” (95). Significantly, Edward O. Ako considers some of the textual forms that emerged as “resistance” to imperial domination to what is variously called Commonwealth Literature, New English Literature, Literature in English, Third World Literature or Postcolonial Literatures. These dissenting views seem to account for the fact that most critics today use the two terms (Commonwealth Literature and Postcolonial Studies) synonymously. Edward Baugh writes that it was time we “change the orientation and scope of English studies” (15) from “the history of the literature of England” to the “study of literature in English” chosen from “Canada, the USA, Africa, Asia, Australia, the West Indies, and, of course, great Britain” (15). John Peck and Martin Coyle make us understand that in the 80s, there was a drift in discussion of what used to be called Commonwealth Literature. They hold that: “By the end of the 1980s, this (Commonwealth Literature) had been transformed into Post colonial Studies taking into consideration not just literature but politics, and history across the world” (182). Peck and Coyle point out that “Different critics have different slants on these issues though all are agreed it is important not to use the term ‘postcolonial’ in a generalizing way so as to obscure distinctions between different people and histories” (204). Another synonym for these terms, they point out is “Migrant writing” (204).

The term “postcolonial” addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of the colonial contact to present day. Ashcroft et al in *Postcolonial Studies Reader* emphasise that restricting the terms to “after colonialism” or “after independence” can be very implicating and misleading for this would falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process because the term postcolonial goes beyond after colonialism and independence, ‘since all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination which even independence has failed to resolve’. Further they explained that the development of new elites within independent societies strengthened by neo-colonial institutions, the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discrimination and the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous people in settler/invader societies are demonstration that postcolonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. They emphasise:

Postcolonialism is not simply a kind of post modernism with politics – it is a sustained attention to the imperial process in colonial and neo-colonial societies, and an examination of the strategies to subvert the actual material and discursive effects of the process. (117)

Helen Tiffin in “Postcolonial Literature and Counter Discourse” states that postcolonial writing aims to:

...interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within (and between) two worlds; to investigate the means by

which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world. (95)

She submits that “New Writings in English”, also “implicitly or explicitly makes notions of continuation of our descent from main stream British Literatures” (Ibid 95).

Like all other literatures therefore, Commonwealth Literature entertains, educates and informs. Apart from these functions however, Commonwealth Literature has a uniqueness conferred to it by its history and development. This uniqueness can be read in the paradox of the diversity and uniformity of its concerns and the richness of its cultural specificities on the one hand and the all unifying English language which has undergone several transformations in the different Commonwealth countries. The definition of political Commonwealth in territorial terms means that it is not synonymous to literary Commonwealth because of the different experiences and the language factor. Commonwealth literature goes beyond the ordinary function of literature to the contend with the question of identity which ranges from defining the postcolonial to positing it against the coloniser’s either by appropriating the English language its common denominator or reconstructing new identities within that ideological whole called Commonwealth. Perhaps a defining characteristic of Commonwealth Literature is the fluctuation of attitudes towards the mother Crown and its claim to leadership. What defines these different attitudes is of course the fact of having been a settler or non-settler colony. Commonwealth Literature as we know today has therefore been, to say the least, a form of postcolonial literature yet the two terms are far from being mutually interchangeable.

CHAPTER TWO

Historical Development of Commonwealth Literature

After the Second World War many British colonies became interested in their indigenous literatures. Among the emerging literatures were *Anthology of West African Verse* published by Ibadan College, *Green and Gold: A Bengali Anthology* (entirely in English); published by the Government of Bengal and *Voices of Ghana*, a collection of creative writing by the significant new Ghanaian poets and prose writers published by the Government of Ghana Broadcasting System (*The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction to the Literature of the British Commonwealth* 3). A.L McLeod in *The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction to the Literature of the British Commonwealth* writes that “The academic associations, too, have come to recognize the importance of Commonwealth literature - the most recent field of specialization within the general area of English” (3). He further states that: “...the various governments within the Commonwealth, and especially those of the newly independent dominions, concur with the view of E. H. Dewart who, in his Preface to *Selections from Canadian Poets* (1864) wrote: “A national literature is an essential element in the formation of a national character” (3). In addition, he insists “...In sum, then, it may fairly be claimed that Commonwealth literature has become accepted as a new and legitimate area of scholarly attention” (Ibid.). He underlines that:

Before 1950 Commonwealth literature was almost synonymous with the early literatures of Australia

and Canada, though New Zealand was often represented by Katherine Mansfield. The explanation is simple: there were few books available in the United States--or in England--from the other areas of the Commonwealth. But in the decade between 1950 and the present even the general reading public in the United States has become familiar with the names of Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, Roger Mais, Ruth Park, Patrick White, Ray Lawler, Han Suyin, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Itrat Zuberi, Claude McKay, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Vic Reid--to mention just a few of the Commonwealth writers whose work has been published in both the United States and England. (4-5)

Commonwealth Caribbean

Carole Boyce Davies enlightens us that during the period of European enslavement of Native American and African people, from the 16th century to the mid-19th century, the most prevalent Caribbean literary forms were autobiography and poetry. From the various colonial intrusions, we realize that the Caribbean is a heterogeneous region, differentiated by a great ethnic, political and cultural multiplicity. William R. Lux writes that "The Caribbean is not like Africa, Asia, or much of Latin America (I refer especially to the Indian areas of the Andes) with clearly established cultural bases to return to after a period of colonial rule" (207-208). He emphasises:

Rather, the Caribbean is composed of manufactured societies, labor camps, creations of empire. The educational system--that great perpetuator of the status quo--was designed to produce in the areas

under or formerly under English colonial rule little black Englishmen steeped in English tradition and history. (Comparable and equally reprehensible is the teaching of the history of white America to black children today in the deep South and presenting it as their history). (208)

Historically speaking, there was little or no literature in the West Indies before the second part of the nineteenth century when printing became a reality in the major regions of the West Indies. The few publications that existed before this period were done by the settlers and even in the late 19th Century and the first half of the 20th century, none of the writers were of the West Indian Diasporic group. Literary works of the Caribbean area written in Spanish, French, or English (“Caribbean Literature”). Carol Boyce Davies writes that written and oral literature of the Caribbean emerged within a context of many languages and cultures. Additionally that:

The languages of the Caribbean—French, English, Spanish, and Dutch—are remnants of the colonizing powers and their historical encounters with the region. Creoles and local *patois* (hybrid languages) developed from the mixture of European languages with Native American languages, especially *Carib* and *Arawak*, and the languages of Africans brought to the Caribbean as slaves. Asians, primarily from India and China, and Middle Easterners also contribute to the region’s cultural diversity. (par.1)

Caribbean Literature is a diverse one. The literature of the Caribbean has no indigenous tradition (ibid). Glenn Phillips

further accentuates that “Commonwealth Caribbean Literature is also appreciably represented”. These creative works are found in novels, short stories, and poems “from the early twentieth century to the present” (177). Glenn O Phillips writes that the Contemporary Caribbean literary works are categorised:

- (a) Hispanic literature,
- (b) French Caribbean literature,
- (c) Haitian literature,
- (d) Commonwealth Caribbean literature. Within each category are two basic types: first is actual poetry, novel, and dramatic script either as complete works or as anthologies; second is the analytical, historical, and critical literature that give purpose, function, and perspective to the literary works. (176)

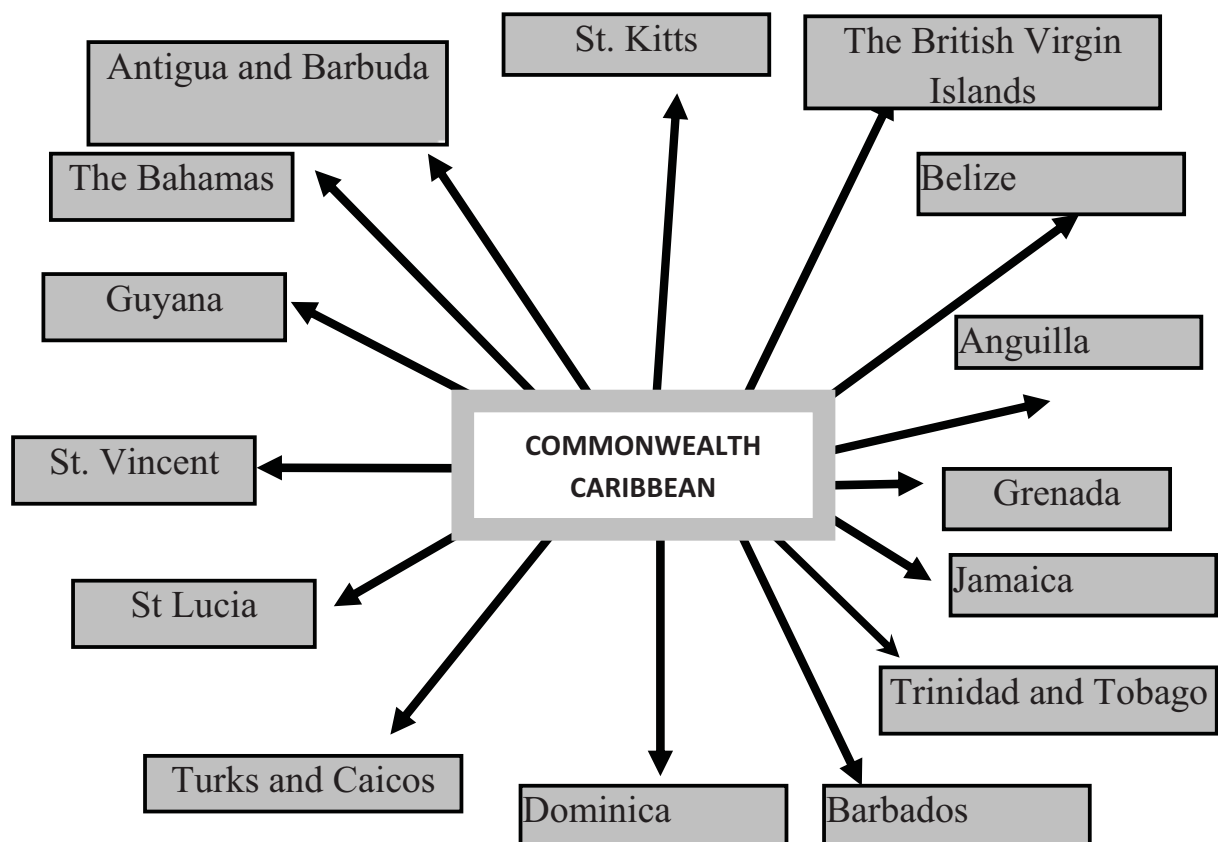
In an attempt to define the Caribbean and its Literature, Louis James in *Caribbean Literature in English* says:

I know of no other area of the world Juheinz John once wrote of the Caribbean basin, where so many important writers and poets are born in so small a population... yet the region would appear unlikely ground for literature. It is rural, economically poor. It is fragmented into Islands... there is no common language; its countries have inherited English... modified into Creole forms which are different within each era. (2)

In the Caribbean, the focus is on Commonwealth Caribbean Literature also known as Anglophone Caribbean Literature or

West Indian Literature. Kenneth Ramchand explains thus: “When the English-speaking territories formed themselves into a political federation in 1959, the name chosen for the nation-to-be was ‘The West Indies.’” (95). He says that the federation was shattered almost immediately, “but the name has remained to signal a reality stronger than any political institution” (ibid.). The federal idea is kept alive because of the existence of “three cultural institutions”. They are: “the University of the West Indies, the all-conquering West Indian cricket team, and West Indian literature” (ibid).

The following countries make up Anglophone Caribbean: Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, The British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos.



Significantly, Kenneth Ramchand further explains that:

West Indian literature includes writings by people who were born or who grew up in the English-speaking territories and Guyana (which did not join the federation after all). This literature is essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon. There was writing about these places, their natural features, and the unnatural social arrangements in them, throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. But when this was not the production of planters and planter-types, government officials, visitors, missionaries, and other birds of passage writing from alien perspectives it was the writing of a small group or class either pursuing its own narrow interests or committed to the idea of Europe as home and center. (95)

So West Indian literature is a twentieth century phenomenon specifically written by people who are born in and from the English speaking territories.

Few Caribbean countries gained their independence before the 20th century; for this reason, the development of distinct national literary traditions began in the 20th century. Ana Pizarro writes that “In the case of the English Caribbean, sustained literary output which generated and accommodated itself to the public came later, in the twentieth century in fact” (176). Davies divides Caribbean literature of the 20th century roughly into three periods: the first 30 years, during colonial rule; the years just prior to independence, from about 1940 to 1960 or later, depending on the country; and the period after independence.



Henn an Moll, "A Map of the West Indies or the Islands of America in the North Sea; with the adjacent counties; explaining what belongs to Spain, England, France, Holland &c. . . ." (London: Bowles & Bowles, c. 1720), detail. (Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Tracy W. McGregor Library of the University of Virginia.)

Ramchand makes us to understand that these writers come from different races:

The West Indian writers of the twentieth century include people of African origin (C.L. R. James, b. 1901; V. S. Reid, b. 1913; Edward Brathwaite, b. 1922; Earl Lovelace, b. 1935); people of Indian origin (V. S. Naipaul, b. 1932; Harold Ladoo, 1942-1973); White West Indians (Jean Rhys, 1890-1979; Geoffrey Drayton, b. 1924; Ralph de Boissiere, b. 1907); and mixtures like Sam Selvon, b. 1923; John Hearne, b. 1921; Wilson Harris, b. 1921; and Edgar Mittelholzer, 1909-1965. (96)

Despite the differences in colour and race, they had similar experiences. Therefore, Ramchand elucidates: “As successive waves of migrants to a new land, they are haunted by ancestral memories or longings; and as specific cultural entities they have all been subjected to an inevitable meeting with other cultures in their new environment” (96). This nostalgia for their motherland is a as result of the alienation they experience in the metropolis. This meeting ‘with other cultures’ will impact on the Diasporic subject in such a way that the latter will inculcate a hybridised identity. The disaporic subject is now between and betwix his indigenous and metropolitan cultures.

The most significant of early writings in the English language is *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831). English-speaking Caribbean writers who published between 1900-1939 include Jamaican novelists Tom Redcam (the pseudonym of Thomas MacDermot), author of *Becka's Buckra Baby* (1903), and Herbert G. de Lisser, author of *Jane's Career* (1914; originally published as *Jane: A*

Story of Jamaica, 1913), *The White Witch of Rosehall* (1929), and *Under the Sun: A Jamaican Comedy* (1937). Boyce states that “Jamaican-born poet *Claude McKay* is perhaps the best-known writer of this generation internationally) (par.10). He published *Constab Ballads* (1912) before moving to New York City. There he became one of the leading writers of the Harlem Renaissance in New York in the 1920s and 1930s, and published *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banana Bottom* (1933). Jamaican poet Una Marson uses blues rhythms in *Tropic Reveries* (1930) and other poetry collections. Moreover, C. L. R. James of Trinidad wrote *Minty Alley* (1936) and the historical study *The Black Jacobins* (1938) where he “protests against colonialism and helps define the anticolonial political and cultural struggles of his time”(par.10). Davies reports that James:

...was instrumental in the formation of the literary magazines *Trinidad* (founded 1929) and *The Beacon* (founded 1931); these magazines aided in the development of a Caribbean literary tradition. Other prominent writers of this period include Trinidadians Alfred Mendes and Ralph de Boissière, both of whom contributed short stories, articles, and poetry to *Trinidad* and *The Beacon*. (par.10)

Phillips mentions the following novels as among the earliest twentieth-century literary works from the Herbert G. de Lisser, *Jane's Career: A Story of Jamaica* (1914)-de Lisser also wrote *Susan Proudleigh* (1915), *The White Witch of Rose Hall* (1929), and *Under the Sun: A Jamaican Comedy* (1937); Alfred Mendes, *Pitch Lake* (1934); Cyril L. R. James, *Minty Alley* (1936); John E. C. McFarlane, *Daphne* (1931); and Claude McKay, *Banana Bottom* (1933). The British West

Indies started writing after World War II. Newly independent states like Barbados, Trinidad, and Jamaica, gave birth to Anglophone writers who began to develop a tradition that focused on a distinctly Caribbean consciousness. The most valuable anthologies are prepared by Walter Jekyll (1907), Una Wilson (1947), J. E. C. McFarlane (1949), Arthur Seymour (1957, 1972), Frank A. Collymore (1959), Edna Manley (1943), Louise Bennett, Barbara Howes (1966), Andrew Salkey (1960, 1965), A. Hendricks, C. Lindo (1962), and John Figueroa (1973)(177). Davies writes that “In the period leading to political independence, a generation of writers emerged whose works voiced the desire for liberation and presented a distinctive portrait of Caribbean culture” (par.11). This included Vic Reid, who published *New Day* in 1949, George Lamming with *In the Castle of My Skin* in 1953 dealing with childhood and coming of age in a colonial context. Davies says of this novel: “The novel focuses on the struggles of three young boys with poverty, a colonial education, social change, and the forging of an identity; hovering in the background is the promise of migration to the metropolitan centers”. She further states that Wilson Harris of Guyana emphasizes the mythology of Native Americans and Africans in his novel *Palace of the Peacock* (1960). Roger Mais portrays the displaced, downtrodden, urban population of the Caribbean in the novels *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1953) and *Brother Man* (1954). Edgar Mittelholzer of Guyana in the novel *A Morning at the Office* (1950), “presents a vivid portrait of Guyana’s countryside and society” (Ibid). Guyana’s Martin Carter *Poems of Resistance from British Guiana* (1954), “voices a hope for liberation from colonial rule” (ibid.). V.S. Naipaul also penned *Mystic Masseur* in 1957 and the canonized *A House for Mr. Biswas* in 1961. Significantly,

Phillips highlights the functional importance of this literature in elucidating the socio-cultural and economic realities of the Caribbean. He states:

The works of Michael Anthony, Edward Ricardo Braithwaite, Jan Carew, Austin Clark, George Lamming, Edgar Mittelholzer, Vidiadhar S. Naipual, Andrew Salkey, Herbert de Lisser, and Claude McKay reflect the socioeconomic struggles of Caribbean peoples from (the lowlands of) Guyana to (the mountains of) Jamaica. (177)

Derek Walcott is most renowned for his poetry “Among poets, the works of St. Lucian born Derek Walcott tower above those of his contemporaries” (Phillips 177). His major publications include: *In a Green Night* (1962), *Selected Poems* (1964), and *The Castaway and Other Poems* (1965). Other poets include George R. Margetson, the Kittitian, who wrote from Boston during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the popular Barbadian historian poet, Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s trilogy, *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969).

Caribbean Literature is also written by Diaspora writers - people of Caribbean ancestry who live outside the Caribbean, primarily in Europe and major urban centers of the United States. Ramchand refers to their novels as “novels of exile, which have a London setting” (96). Amongst these are Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), George Lamming’s *The Emigrants* (1954), and V. S. Naipual’s *The Mimic Men* (1967). He explains that these novels “have as their main characters figures obviously drawn from distinct social/racial groups within West Indian

society”(Ibid). He further elaborates: “...As novels about West Indians adrift in the metropolis, they tell the same story and explore the same emotions” (96). Others include Jean Buffong of Grenada, Joan Riley of Jamaica, Grace Nichols of Guyana, Amryl Johnson of Trinidad, Beryl Gilroy of Guyana, and Janice Shinebourne of Guyana. In the United States, Antigua-born Jamaica Kincaid, Dominican-born Julia Alvarez, Haitian-born Edwidge Danticat, and Jamaican-born Michelle Cliff have garnered critical attention. Caribbean history is very important in Caribbean writing. Of the older generation of West Indian writers who remained active through the seventies and eighties to the present 21st century, V.S. Naipaul is the most celebrated of them. Others are Samuel Selvon, Wilson Harris, John Carew and Andrew Salkey, who immigrated to England, continued to live abroad. Writers like Caryl Phillips have turned attention to the Caribbean.

Commonwealth Caribbean female writers have not paralleled male writers in terms of prolific writing as in many regions of the world. . This does not mean that there have been no West Indian Women writers, but merely that they have not appeared sufficiently to break in a male stronghold on literature. In 1966, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* certainly brought the subject of West Indian women into a sharp focus. In any case, by the seventies and eighties, some female novelists did appear, for example, Merle Hodge and Jamaica Kincaid. They set the stage for other women writers. Jamaica Kincaid’s work is particularly interesting for the light it sheds on the condition of West Indian women. Caribbean women writers also facilitated the growth of Caribbean literature. The First International Conference on Women Writers of the English-Speaking Caribbean took place at Wellesley College in Massachusetts in April 1988 focusing on “{Caribbean women

who had published poetry and fiction in English and who up to that moment had scarcely been recognized as a group”(Sue N. Greene 532). Greene informs that the Second International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers, which held at St. Augustine campus of The University of the West Indies in Trinidad in April 1990, widened its focus, and although, again, the conference was dominated by women from the English-speaking Caribbean, it included representatives from the rest of the Caribbean and emphasized the critic as much as the author.

Chronology of Caribbean Literature in English Created by Dave Lichtenstein ‘99, Contributing Editor, Caribbean Web

Before 1913	No literary works published by native West Indians. Writing on the Caribbean consisted mainly of Victorian women’s travelogues and slave narratives like those of <i>Frederick Douglass</i> or <i>Olaudah Equiano</i> .
1913	E.G. de Lisser creates his own publishing company, called Pioneer Press, in Jamaica. He uses it to put out his novel <i>Jane: A Story of Jamaica</i> , the first truly significant english novel from the Caribbean. This was followed by <i>Jane’s Career</i> , <i>The White Witch of Rosehall</i> , and several other works.
1929	J.E.C. McFarlane (Jamaica) edits <i>Voices from Summerland</i> , the first anthology of British West Indian verse.
1929-	Flourish of literary creation in Trinidad: Alfred

1933	Mendes and C.L.R. James put out <i>Trinidad Christmas 1929</i> and <i>Easter 1930</i> ; Albert Gomes creates <i>New Beacon</i> , published monthly from 1931 to 1933.
1933	Jamaican Claude McKay, writing as part of the Harlem Renaissance, publishes <i>Banana Bottom</i> and in 1939, <i>Gingertown</i> .
1942	The monthly journal <i>Bimbegun</i> by Frank Collymore (Barbados). This journal, which is still published (though irregularly) today, brings together Caribbean creative and critical writing. Contributors have included A.N. Forde and <i>Kamau Brathwaite</i> .
1942-1959	B.B.C. program Caribbean Voices establishes major platform of Caribbean writers in England. Edited by Una Marsan and Henry Swanzy.
1943-1960	The annual publication <i>Focuscreated</i> ; edited by Edna Manley and other in Jamaica, it allowed a forum in which left wing creative writers (such as George Campbell and V.S. Reid) could speak. Revived in 1983.
1945-1961	A.J. Seymour (Guyana) edits <i>Kyk-over-Al</i> Contributors include Wilson Harris, Edgar Mittelholzer and critics Ivan van Sertima and Kenneth Ramchand.

1948	First major wave of Caribbean emigrants to England; literary movement of these emigrants blossoms with leaders such as Edgar Mittleholzer, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, and Andrew Salkey.
1949	University of the West Indies (UWI) founded in Jamaica (with later campuses in Trinidad, Barbados, and Guyana). Graduates and teachers to include Derek Walcott, Wayne Brown, Mervyn Morris, John Hearne, Gordon Rohlehr, and Kenneth Ramchand.
1949	V.S. Reid publishes <i>New Day</i> ; a celebration of Jamaican independence that used a modified form of Jamaican dialect.
1950	Edgar Mittleholzer writes <i>A Day at the Office</i> , dramatizes the social structure of Trinidad through his presentation of a morning at an office building.
1952	Mittleholzer, <i>Children of Kaywana</i> , Selvon, <i>A Brighter Sun</i> .
1953	Phyllis Allfrey, <i>The Orchid House</i> , George Lamming (Barbados), <i>In the Castle of My Skin</i> . While Allfrey's novel receives little notice, Lamming's work gains widespread attention and catalyzes a decade-long flourish of Caribbean literature in British publishing.

1955	John Hearne (Jamaica), <i>Voices Under the Window</i> . Other prominent works include <i>The Land of the Living</i> (1961) and <i>The Sure Salvation</i> (1986).
1960	Wilson Harris (Guyana), <i>Palace of the Peacock</i> . Other titles later compiled into “The Guyana Quartet” are <i>Far Journey of Oudin</i> (1961), and <i>Whole Armour</i> (1962); also <i>Secret Ladder</i> (1963) and <i>Heartland</i> (1964).
1961	V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad), <i>A House for Mr. Biswas</i> , perhaps the most canonized and widely read novel in the British West Indies.
1961	Franz Fanon (Martinique), <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> ; explores psychological elements in Postcolonial struggles. Influence reaches much of Third World, including Caribbean.
1962	Derek Walcott’s first major collection, <i>In a Green Night</i> . Followed by <i>The Castaway</i> (1965), <i>The Gulf</i> (1969), and other collections.
1965	Michael Anthony (Trinidad), <i>The Year in San Fernando</i> . Creates a Caribbean child’s perspective, which also appeared in works such as Lamming’s <i>In the Castle of My Skin</i> , Geoffrey Drayton’s <i>Christopher</i> (1959) and Ian Macdonald’s <i>The Humming Bird Tree</i> (1969).

1966	Caribbean Artists movement initiated in London by Kamau Brathwaite, Andrew Salkey, John la Rose, etc. Through conferences at the University of Kent (1963, 1967) and the inauguration of the periodical <i>Savacou</i> (1969) the movement attempted to coordinate Caribbean writers and artists.
1966	Jean Rhys (Dominica), <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> ; a retelling of <i>Jane Eyre</i> from the perspective of the Creole “madwoman” in the attic.
1967	V.S. Naipaul, <i>The Mimic Men</i> .
1967	Kamau Brathwaite, <i>Rights of Passage</i> , later incorporated into the trilogy “The Arrivants” along with <i>Masks</i> (1968) and <i>Islands</i> (1969).
1968	Wilson Harris, <i>Tumatumari</i> .
1968	<i>The Islands in Between</i> published, the first anthology of Anglophone Caribbean literary criticism; composed mainly of Caribbean writers.
1970	Merle Hodge (Jamaica), <i>Crick Crack Monkey</i> . Its publication signals an emergence of the women’s perspective in Caribbean literature, paving the way for such work as Jamaica Kincaid’s (Antigua) <i>At the Bottom of the River</i> , 1983; <i>Jane and Lousia Will Soon come Home</i> by Erna Brodber (Jamaica), 1980; and <i>Beka Lamb</i> by Zee Edgell (Belize), 1982.

1970	Derek Walcott, <i>Dream on Monkey Mountain and other Plays</i> .
1972	Walter Rodney (Guyana), <i>How Europe Underdeveloped Africa</i> . A historical attack on European colonial powers.
1973	Derek Walcott, <i>Another Life</i> . An intricate, groundbreaking autobiographical poem.
1974	Roy Heath (Guyana), <i>A Man Come Home</i> . Followed by <i>The Murderer</i> (1978); wins Guardian Fiction Prize.
1977	Kamau Brathwaite, <i>Mother Poem</i> : inaugurates his second trilogy to be completed with <i>Sun Poem</i> (1982) and <i>Ex/Self</i> (1987).
1979	Earl Lovelace, <i>The Dragon Can't Dance</i> .
1979	V.S. Naipaul, <i>A Bend in the River</i> .
1982	Earl Lovelace, <i>The Wine of Astonishment</i> .
1987	Naipaul, <i>The Enigma of Arrival</i> .
1989	Derek Walcott, <i>Omeros</i> .
1989	<i>The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures</i> by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth

	Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin published. Seminal work in defining and organizing Post-Colonial terms and theory, formal entrance into scholarly world.
1990	Jamaica Kincaid, <i>Lucy</i> .
1991	Caryl Phillips, <i>Cambridge</i> .
1992	Derek Walcott becomes first Caribbean author to win Nobel Prize for literature.
1994	Erna Brodber, <i>Louisiana</i> .

Source:

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/caribbean/history/litchrono.html>

Canadian Literature

Canadian literature started at the beginning of the 20th century by colonist to who conformed both in content and form to the tradition of London and Paris, since their colonial masters were from these areas. But from the 1930s, Canadian literature started evolving with the coming of age of a generation which had emigrated or whose father had emigrated from Europe. Gregg opined that “Canada grew as a white, European, and Christian nation of immigrants grateful for the opportunity to start over in a new land” (44). These emigrants grew-up in the slumps of the industrial cities. They produced a school of society. And so they were referred to as the social poets. Canadian poets include the following among others Margaret Atwood, Gwendolyn McEwen, George Bowering and AL Purdy. Dionne Brand in her poetry collection entitled *Land to*

Light On is said to offer “the particular experiences of the minoritized migrant subject. In Brand’s poems, speakers renounce the nation-building project and the commitment to “offices or islands, continents, graphs” (47)—especially when this commitment demands the surrender of “parentheses” about the “engine turning up refugees, / corporate boards, running shoes, new economic plans” (102 cited in Jennifer Henderson 790). These poets express the life of their time. They represented the only school in Canadian literature. Other writers are just isolated figures that have written long narrative poems mainly on subjects from Canadian history, poets of the contemporary generation are less interested in social poetry than in personal experience which they seek to give a face of its own through their creative imagination.

Homelessness, identity and nationhood are the central preoccupation of Canadian culture and literature. There are historical, geographical, and cultural factors responsible such as the “the truncated history of a settler colony, the lack of a Western frontier in a country entered as if one were “being silently swallowed by an alien continent” (217), a defensive colonial ‘garrison mentality’ (226) – explanations that were unified by their unexamined Eurocentrism” (Jennifer Henderson 789). Jennifer Henderson further elucidates that:

In the fiction of English-speaking Canada and Quebec from the 1970s to the 1990s considered by Marie Vautier and Dawn Thompson, the authors locate textual strategies that speak to wider questions in postcolonial and feminist theory, pointing the way beyond the impasses of self-other problematizations and identity politics founded on a right to self-representation. The question of national specificity is

displaced here by a focus on literary mode and formal technique. (790)

Significantly, some of the fiction written between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s represents the “period of political insecurity in Canada, involving intense debates about Quebec’s place in the federation and the legitimacy of a new, repatriated constitution that Quebec refused to sign because it failed to recognize the province as a distinct society” (792). She further states that:

Thus, the novels represent distant and sometimes incredible characters and events, they also offer oblique commentaries on the political issues of their present: the contradictions of *pure laine* nationalism, the politics of representing “others,” and the need for reparative justice in relation to groups historically constructed as “internal enemies” of the Canadian state. (792)

“Second-generation” black writing in English Canada is also established. Black Canadian writing has been in existence for over two hundred years. Canadian author Andre Alexis is a prime contender for the category of “second-generation black Canadian writer,” David Chariandy states that Alexis “is a most talented playwright, literary critic, radio-show host, and fiction writer perhaps best known for his popular and critically acclaimed novel *Childhood*” (821). “Alexis was actually born in Trinidad in 1957, but raised in Canada (primarily Ottawa) since the age of four, and he happens to be the first nationally and internationally prominent writer of African Caribbean heritage to have been socialized in Canada during most of the

formative years of childhood and early adulthood”(ibid).David Chariandy informs that “black Canadian literature, writ large, is a legitimate field or concern in the Canadian cultural landscape” (819). He further illuminates:

Moreover, in perhaps only the past fifteen or twenty years, black Canadian writing in general has grown from a small press and community-based phenomenon into something of significant, albeit precarious, national attention, institutional recognition, and academic legitimacy. This relatively recent “coming into representation,” as Stuart Hall might put it (*New Ethnicities*), is most certainly indebted to the work of talented and politically dedicated writers of African descent like Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke, George Elliott Clarke, Claire Harris, Lawrence Hill, M. NourbeSe Philip, and Makeda Silvera, but also to the efforts of numerous critics, cultural producers, and activists (from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds) who have helped translate the peculiar energies of literary texts into broader demands for racial justice and cultural citizenship (see Coleman and Goellnicht, as well as Miki, for instance). (820)

Canadian contemporary Fiction draws attention “to a body of contemporary fiction engaged in a complex reworking of inherited myths and a reformulation of the concept of myth itself, as a provisional narrative grounded in a specific history” (Henderson 791). Their narratives “describe a form of narrative that uses local and popular materials to dismantle European

worldviews” (ibid). Moreover, contemporary Anglophone-Canadian and Québécois historical novels betray a “didactic urge” to accord mythic significance to events in the history of the New World, even as they work to undercut assumptions about the immutability and transhistoricity of myth (285 cited in Henderson).

Australian Literature

Australian and Indo-Anglian literatures have been more prolific than any other Commonwealth writing. This is because Australia has a single national language “in contrast to Canada where a large proportion of the literate population uses French” and “the educated indigenous population of India has used English as its language of intercourse and literature for upwards of two hundred years. Even those Indians who use English as their second language have become enviable masters of the idiom and cadences of the best English rhetoric” (*The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction* 5). Australia is an “island continent in the South Pacific” (Webby 6). The indigenous people lived in the island for thousands of years “relatively undisturbed by visitors or invaders from outside” (ibid). Elizabeth Webby states that in 1786:

The British government dispatches a small fleet of eleven ships, carrying officers, marines and 736 convicted felons, to found a penal settlement at Botany Bay in New South Wales. ...from the sixteenth century onwards, a number of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch ships had come into contact with various parts of Australian coast and their captains had charted much of it.(6)

Many of these explorers in 1642 named the island Abel Tasman, a Dutch named the smaller island which was later rechristened Tasmania, Van Diemen's Land, in 1644 he named part of the West Coast of the mainland as New Holland. Tasmania becomes the place of secondary punishment where "the worst convicts, who have committed further offences in Australia were sent" (8). Van Diemen's Land experienced the wiping out of the indigenous population because of the rapid spread of European settlement and the growth of wool industry. In 1770 Captain James Cook claimed the eastern part of the continent for the British Crown and named it New South Wales. He believed that since there were few indigenous inhabitants who did not "use the land in the European sense of cultivating it, they did not own it" (Webby 7). Consequently, Australia was cleared and declared "terra nullius", that is land that belongs to no one until this assumption was overturned in 1992 at the Australian High Court Landmark Mabo decision. In 1829 another "British settlement was commenced in Swan River". The whole of the Southern continent was now claimed by the British (8). Phyllis Fahrie Edelson informs that: "Early Australian Literature can be traced back in time to well before the British arrived on the continent". He further states that:

For there was in Europe a literature about Australia, a number of legends that whispered of gold in a southern continent inhabited by a savage race. It was legends that spurred the exploration of the great land mass that stretched out between Africa and America, called on old maps *terra australis*. (xiii)

In the 1870s and 1880s the Australian colonies continued to prosper. In the 1890s there were agitations for the Australian colonies to unite and this eventually led to the Commonwealth of Australia on January 1st 1901. This Commonwealth of Australia was made up of former colonies of New South Wales (NSW), Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and Queensland.

Australian Literature can be traced back to Henry Gyles Turner, “a banker and litterateur, and Alexander Sutherland, a school teacher and journalist, both from Melbourne,” who published *The Development of Australian Literature* in 1898 (Elizabeth Webby 1). This was the first of many attempts to provide “A General Sketch of Australian Literature”. Forty-seven pages were devoted to poetry, about thirty to fiction and eighteen to “general literature: mainly history, biography, and works of travel and exploration” (Elizabeth Webby 1). In 1961 H.M. Green followed this with his monumental two-volume *A History of Australian Literature Pure and Applied* which covers the period from 1789-1950. He discusses “pure” categories of poetry, fiction and drama and a wide range of “applied works, from newspapers and magazines through to works of philosophy and anthropology” (Webby 1). This collection reflected the then ‘dominant progressive model of literary history’: 1789-1850 documents the initial “conflict” through “consolidation stage” (1850-1890) the “self conscious nationalism” phase (1890-1923) the “world consciousness and disillusion” phase (1923-1950). The new period from 1890s represents the period when Australian Literature changed from being a colonial to a truly national one (2). In 1964 Geoffrey Dutton published an edited collection of essays entitled *The Literature of Australia* and this was reissued in 1974. Leonie Kramer professor of Australian Literature published *The*

Oxford History of Australian Literature in 1981. This was elitist in structure and focused “on only the ‘pure’ literary genres of poetry, fiction and drama” (Webby 2). *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia* replaced the former in 1988 and this collection reacted against Kramer’s elitism” (Webby 3).

Adam Lindsay Gordon, Henry Kendall and novelist Marcus Clarke were thought to be of great significance to Australian literature. Gordon was once referred to “as the ‘national poet of Australia’ and is the only Australian with a monument in Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey in England” (par.8 *Wikipedia*). Others include Oodgeroo Noonuccal also known as Kath Walker (*We Are Going* (1964), David Unaipon (Australia’s first aboriginal writer, published *Native Legends* (1929 an autobiographical text *My Life Story* (1951)) Jack Davis, Colin Johnson, Kevin Gilbert. Oodgeroo Noonuccal, David Unaipon, Jack Davis, Colin Johnson and Kevin Gilbert are considered as the founders of contemporary Aboriginal literature.

The birth of “modern Australian drama arguably began with the first one act plays of Louis Esson (1879-1943)”. He is the first playwright to appropriate ‘the emergent conventions of modern European drama to palpably Australian Material’ (*Australian Contemporary Drama 1909-1982* 1). Other playwrights who adapted this mode after him are Stephen Sewell and Louis Nowra. It should be noted that Australia was at first a nation “geographically isolated from its European roots as much as its separate units of settlement were isolated from each other and these geographical circumstances have made their mark on the coming of age of Australian drama” (1).

Moreover after the Second World War, The universities of the United States and the Commonwealth “have given considerable encouragement to the study of and to research into the area of Commonwealth literature”. Thus the following journals were founded:

Meanjin, published by the University of Melbourne, *Southerly*, published by the English Association, Sydney, *Canadian Literature*, the *University of Toronto Quarterly* and the numerous university student journals have generously encouraged young poets and story writers. In addition, the University of Cape Town has instituted Conferences on South African Writing for visiting scholars; the University of British Columbia and Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, accommodated the first Canadian Writers’ Conferences in 1956 and 1957. Duke University has, with generous financial support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, established a Commonwealth Studies Center which is assured of funds until 1964. (*The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction* 3-4)

Commonwealth Literature became a new focus in academics and various scholarly conferences. At the 1960 Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association, papers were presented on the literature of Canada and the “sisters of the south”--Australia and New Zealand--and a *Commonwealth Literature Newsletter* was planned. Moreover, several American university professors “received Fulbright grants to enable them to study the literatures of Australia and New

Zealand or South Africa (*The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction* 4). In sum, then, “it may fairly be claimed that Commonwealth Literature has become accepted as a new and legitimate area of scholarly attention” (ibid).

It is stated that “Before 1950 Commonwealth literature was almost synonymous with the early literatures of Australia and Canada, though New Zealand was often represented by Katherine Mansfield” because published books from the other areas of the Commonwealth were not available in England or the US (ibid). Nevertheless in the decade between 1950 and the present McLeod writes:

even the general reading public in the United States has become familiar with the names of Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, Roger Mais, Ruth Park, Patrick White, Ray Lawler, Han Suyin, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Itrat Zuberi, Claude McKay, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Vic Reid--to mention just a few of the Commonwealth writers whose work has been published in both the United States and England. (4)

With this recognition, more books were published. The Oxford University Press published the following: *A Book of South African Verse*, *A Book of Australian Verse and Australian Short Stories*, and the University of Chicago Press published Joseph Furphy Australian classic, *Such is Life*, while The Michigan State University Press published Henry Lawson’s *Selected Poems and Stories*. The Penguin published Anthologies of Australian, Canadian and New Zealand verse (*The Commonwealth Pen: An Introduction...5*).

Indian Literature

Of all the Commonwealth countries and regions, India perhaps holds the oldest literary tradition. Though colonised by Britain, it is wrong to assume that Indian literature like its African counterpart developed and flourished only with the colonisation and decolonisation of the subcontinent. As Indira Viswanathan Peterson in “Indian Literature” argues, India has an older literary tradition than Britain and the rest of the colonising world. “Throughout its history, India has absorbed and transformed the cultures of the peoples who have moved through the region. As a result, the Indian literary tradition is one of the world’s oldest and richest” (Par. 1).

This richness of Indian Literature is a consequence of its history. The Indian subcontinent today consists of three countries namely India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; but prior to the partition in 1947 the entire region was known as India. Nothing speaks for the diversity of India as its numerous languages, a reflection, not only of the multicultural nature of the people, but equally and more importantly, of the uniqueness of its diversity to which Amit Chaudhuri, echoing the views of other critics, refers to as “the Babel of tongues (xxi). He nonetheless points out that far from implying the representation of India as “many-headed, many-voiced, inchoate Hindu behemoth, [the Babel of tongues] would serve more accurately as an emblem for the increased embourgeoisement of India in the twentieth century” (xxi). There are however eighteen major languages (and several minor vernacular tongues) in India today, the dominant ones being Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Tamil. Nothing has had as much influence on early Indian writing as religion. All the world’s major religions are practiced in India, and this

perhaps explains the prominence of the religious factor in Indian Literature. Peterson posits that:

The mythology of the dominant Hindu religion portrays the deities Vishnu, Shiva, the Goddess (Devi), and others. This mythology has influenced Indian texts, from ancient epics in the Sanskrit language to medieval poems in the various languages of different regions to modern works in English. (Par.2)

The origins of Indian Literature can be traced back to the Vedas, which are Hindu sacred texts. Composed around 1500 BC and 1000 BC in Old Sanskrit, also called Vedic Sanskrit, they are the earliest examples of Indian literature. As Peterson points out:

This language belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. Indo-Aryan languages dominated northern India in ancient times, and Sanskrit became the major language of Indian religious and philosophical writing and classical literature. It also served as a common language with which scholars from different regions could communicate. No longer spoken widely, it is maintained as a *literary language* in modern India, meaning that people still use it for written works. (Par. 3)

With the advent of such popular religions as Buddhism and Jainism in the 6th century BC, came literature in Pali and in other dialects of Sanskrit known as *Prakrit* (“natural

language”). In the South, Peterson stresses, Tamil, a Dravidian language, emerged as the most important language. A recorded literature in Tamil dates from the 1st century AD. Rich literary traditions have emerged in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, which are modern languages that developed from Old Tamil and its dialects (Par. 4)

Around the 10th and 18th century AD, the different dialects of India developed into languages 18 of which have been accorded official status alongside English. The development of these languages invariably produced distinctive literatures across the subcontinent; distinctive in style and themes. Like in Africa, Oral traditions have played an important role in Indian Literature as many storytellers present traditional Indian texts by reciting them.

The development of Indian Literature can be divided into five major phases; the Beginnings, the period of Classical Literature, Medieval Literature; Colonial period to independence, and post-independence. The beginning phase of Indian Literature was marked by two major forms of writing, namely religious texts produced between 16th century BC and 1st Century AD. The major works of the time were the Vedas, a compilation of hymns of praise to nature deities and chants to accompany Aryan religious rituals. The Classical period which started around the first century AD flourished during the Gupta dynasty between 320 and 550.

A major form of classical literature was what was known as Kavya. Written in Sanskrit, the term is related to “works that were composed primarily for pleasure and that employed complex literary conventions and elaborate metrical schemes”. Kavya developed genres that were very similar to premodern European Literature; epic, lyric, drama, and various types of fiction. A major Indian classical writer is Kalidasa

whose major works include His epic poems *Raghuvamsa* (Dynasty of Raghu) and *Meghaduta*, his poetic drama *Shakuntala* .

The third phase in the development of Indian Literature came with period Medieval which the rise of regional languages, the first direct consequence of which was the development of regional literatures which greatly varied not only in language but in themes as well. Although by this time Buddhism had lost its central position as the main religion in India, much of the writing still had a strong religious influence especially with the coming of Islam as a result of the conquest.

The penultimate phase is the period between the coming of the colonial masters (Britain) around the 1700s and independence in 1947. Colonial education and language (English) exposed Indians to new ideas and led them to explore their own literary and cultural heritage from new perspectives especially with the translation of existing literature into English. With the development of the printing press and the emergence of Newspapers and magazines, Indians were able to write and be read across their large continent. This was the period of Bengali renaissance. According to Chaudhuri, ‘One of the most profound and creative cross-fertilizations between two cultures in the modern age took place in Bengal in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ (3). Peterson in “Indian Literature” adds that “the writers of the Bengal Renaissance led the way in synthesizing Indian and Western ideas in literature and culture. A prominent figure of this period was Michael Madhsudan Dutt whose major known work is the epic *Maghnada Badha Kabya*(1861). The best examples of Modern Indian literature in English are in poetry. One of the best known writers of early modern Indian literature is Rabindranath Tagore who began his career in the late 19th

century with innovative poetry in the Bengali language. Some of his works include *Gitanjali (Song Offerings, 1910)*, a collection of poems and *Dak-ghar (The Post Office, 1912)*,

Two female poets of the time, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, both Bengali by birth, distinguished themselves with works in English. *The Golden Threshold (1905)* is a major collection of Naidu's poems, which often focus on themes relating to Indian cultural traditions and Indian women's lives. Naidu also wrote speeches and essays, and she became a leader of the nationalist movement, which sought independence from Britain. Subrahmaniya Bharati wrote some of the earliest prose and poetry in the modern form of the Tamil language.

The final phase in the development of Indian Literature is the post-independence period which starts in 1947. With independence, Indian writing had to shift focus to grapple with the ideals of a new nation, identity issues and other invariable post-independence concerns that affect most former colonies. Yet independence was unique in the sense that it came with the partitioning of the country into Hindu-dominated India and Muslim-dominated Pakistan which was later separated from Bangladesh. This partition, much like the partition of Africa literally uprooted people from their cultures and this perhaps explains the centrality of identity issues in post-1947 Indian fiction. A significant development in Indian literature in the mid- and late 20th century was the rise of female writers and feminist writing.

Some prominent writers from the 1930s onwards include Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, and R. K. Narayan, did international writing circles begin to take notice of Indian writing in English. Literary works between the 1950s and 1980s include Narayan's *The Financial Expert (1952)*, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961)*, and *The Vendor of Sweets*

(1967), Anita Desai's in *Clear Light of Day* (1980), and *In Custody* (1984). In 1980 Salman Rushdie published the novel *Midnight's Children, Shame* (1983), a novel about Pakistan, and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). Others include Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* (1988) Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995). Amitav Ghosh published *The Shadow Lines* in 1988; Arundhati Roy came to the fore in the late 1990s and won the Booker Prize for her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997). Peterson argues that:

Rushdie, Seth, Ghosh, and Roy are only a few of the many prominent Indian writers who have written powerful novels about living in a postcolonial world and who have gained attention on the world stage. The writings of these authors—with their innovative approaches, compelling drama, and masterful style—make Indian literature, especially that in English, one of the most robust national literatures in the modern world. (Indira Viswanathan Peterson)

Commonwealth Africa

Written literature in Africa started in the twentieth century because literacy came to the African society until the 20th century. Significantly most of African Literature is in the language of their colonisation (English, French, Portuguese, etc).before this period works that existed were oral and in many of the African mother tongues. It was oral and passed one generation to the other by words of mouth. Griots, bards and oral performers recited their oral lore from memory. It was through their oral tradition that people in society were

educated, entertained and taught the heroic deeds of the past and their norms and values. In these wise their folktales, proverbs, epics, songs, rituals performed the role of written literature. Oyekan Owomoyela in “African Literature” adds:

Africa’s oral literature takes the form of prose, verse, and proverb, and texts vary in length from the epic, which might be performed over the course of several days, to single-sentence formulations such as the proverb. The collective body of oral texts is variously described as folklore, verbal art, oral literature, or (more recently) orature.(par.2)

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Myths are one of the manifestations of pre-literate culture and are one of the oral prose texts. The Greeks say that myths referred to some traditional stories with basic qualities as profundity, imagination, other worldliness, and universality or larger-than life. Plato says that myth is truth woven with fiction. It is commonly expressed as a story involving gods or

heroes. Myth articulates a culture's worldview, life goals. In this light Owomoyela explains that:

Foremost among prose forms in African literature is the myth. Like myths everywhere, African myths typically explain the creation of the universe, the activities of the gods at the beginning of creation, the essence of all creatures, and the nature of their interrelationships. (par 3)

Other prose forms in oral literature are legend, epic, folktale. Epigrams, proverbs, incantations and riddles are examples of oral poetry. Rituals and festivals constitute African oral drama.

The best-known literatures in African languages include those in Yoruba and Hausa in West Africa; Sotho, Xhosa, and Zulu in southern Africa; and Amharic, Somali, and Swahili in East Africa. In West Africa, Bishop Ajayi Crowther “developed a script for the language and in 1900 published the first Yoruba translation of the Bible. Isaac Babalola Thomas published the first work of fiction in Yoruba, *Sègilolá eléyinjú egé* (Segilola of the Seductive Eyes, 1929).” (Oyekan Owomoyela par. 14) Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa, “first work is also the first full-length novel published in Yoruba: *Ògbójú ode nínú igbó irúnmalè* (1938) was translated by Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunter's Saga* (1968)” (Oyekan Owomoyela par.14).

In London, the Faber and Faber Publishing house issued Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinker* which led to curiosity about Anglo – African writing. The West African region of the Commonwealth has produced overwhelming

writings from Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon. Azfar Hussain cites Anne Tibble's observation in *African-English Literature*:

Thinking briefly, of West Africa as a self-contained literary unit--which of course it is not, though cross-currents with East and South Africa are not strong--we may say that this section of the continent began its production of a written literature latest of the three...When as late as the 1940s, West Africa did awake, the number of its writers quickly grew. Especially so was the case in Nigeria, in spite of the hundred or more indigenous languages there. The total of poets, novelists, and dramatists in West Africa as a whole quickly exceeded those in the South or East. (Par.4)

And some of the most outstanding writers come from Nigeria alone: Amos Tutola; Gabriel Okara, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Flora Nwapa, Wole Soyinka, Elechi Amadi, Buchi Emecheta, Ben Okri, Christopher Okigbo, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, John Ekwere, Mabel Sagun, Michael Echeruo. Some other Poets in West Africa other than Nigeria include Lenrie Peters of Gambia, and the Ghanaians, George Awoonor-Williams, Efua Theodora Sutherland, Kwesi Brew, and Ellis Ayitey Komey.

Authors Name	Country	Title of text
Amos Tutuola(1920-	Nigerian	<i>The Palm Wine Drinkard, My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle, The Brave African Huntress</i>
Gabriel Okara (1921, poet-novelist,)	Nigerian	Poetry: <i>Were I to Choose and Other Poems</i> ; novel: <i>The Voice</i>
Chinua Achebe(1930--, novelist and prose writer)	Nigerian	<i>Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People, Arrow of God, Anthills of the Savannah</i>
Cyprian Ekwensi (novelist-short story writer)	Nigerian	<i>People of the City, Jagua Nana, Burning Grass, Beautiful Feathers</i>
Flora Nwapa (1931-1993 novelist-short story writer)	Nigerian	<i>Efuru, Idu, Never Again, One is Enough, This is Lagos and Other Stories, Wives at War and Other Stories, Women are Different</i>
Wole Soyinka (1934--, Nobel-prize-winning novelist-playwright-poet	Nigerian	<i>The Swamp Dwellers, The Trials of Brother Jero, The Strong Breed, The Lion and the Jewel, Madmen and Specialists, A Dance of the Forest</i> ; novels: <i>The Interpreters, Season of Anomy</i> ;

		memoir: <i>Aké: The Years of Childhood</i> ; poetry: <i>Idanre, Mandela's Earth and Other Poems. Ogun Abibiman</i>
Elechi Amadi (1934-- novelist, principal works	Nigerian	<i>The Concubine, The Great Ponds, The Slave, Sunset in Biafra</i>
Buchi Emecheta (1944- novelist	Nigerian	<i>In the Ditch, Second Class Citizen, The Bride Price, The Slave Girl, The Joys of Motherhood, Destination Biafra, The Rape of Shavi</i>
Ben Okri (1959- novelist-short story writer)	Nigerian	<i>Flowers and Shadows, The Landscapes Within, The Famished Road; short stories: Incidents at the Shrine, Stars of the New.</i>
Kofi Anyidoho (Poet)	Ghana	<i>This Earth, My Brother</i>
Author's Name	East African Region Country	Title of Text
Okot p. Bitek (1931- 1982, poet	Uganda	Principal works: <i>Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol, The Horn of My Love.</i>
Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938-- novelist-short story writer-prose writer and playwright	Kenya	principal works: <i>Weep Not, Child, A Grain of Wheat, Petals of Blood, The River Between, Devil</i>

		<i>on the Cross), The Wizard of Crow</i>
Shaaban Robert (1909—1962, prose- /story-writer & poet,	Tanzania	Principal works: <i>Maisha Yanga</i> ”Autobiography,” <i>Kufikirika</i> ”The Conceivable World,” <i>Insha na Mashairi/</i> “Compositions and Poems”),
David Rubadiri (1930-, novelist-poet,	Malawi	Principal works: <i>No Bride Price, Selected Poems</i>),

From our historical survey, it is evident that Commonwealth Literature is literature produced by various peoples who were formerly under British colonisation – Great Britain. It is an entity of literature produced by the third world – a multi-literature written in the English language.

The historical development of Commonwealth Literature has been national literature. It is particularly through several phases. Some countries started writing as early as the 16th century while others started only recently after WW 2. Yet, in either case, the point is that Commonwealth Literature has existed for centuries though some of the contemporary genres only developed recently. In places like Africa where writing only developed recently, the dominant literary form was oral literature which has been incorporated into the modern novel and poetry and drama to create a rich repertoire of literary expression. From settler colonies like Canada, New Zealand, and Australia to non-settler and semi-settler ones like Commonwealth Caribbean, Commonwealth West and East Africa, Commonwealth Literature has grown to one big voice in the domain of literary expression; reason, perhaps, why the

line has to be drawn with Postcolonial Literature. The question is how are the different literary form expressed in Commonwealth Literature and what is the significance of these.

CHAPTER THREE

Dissent in Commonwealth Literature

Commonwealth Literature has made such a strong impact upon the techniques of writing and ways of reading literature in much of the world. Significantly in the last several decades, the importance of representing the diverse cultural perceptions and ethnic views about their heritage has been a great burden on Commonwealth writers. Commonwealth Literature has developed in different geographical, cultural and political contexts and thus has become an international genre. It is a literature that captures all the socio-cultural, religious, political, historical, and economic and complexity of many different cultural experiences it is linked with. As O'Reilly points out, "it would be a mistake to imply that all authors can be neatly tied either culturally or personally to their countries of origin" (10). Significantly authors ideas, personal experiences, feelings, desires also account for the dissent in Commonwealth Literature. This is seen from the biographical material sometimes found in this literature. Another thing is that writers are influenced by ideologies; culture and society; historical circumstances; patronage; human aims, aspirations, and desires of their societies. Ambiguities and areas of discord are evoked in the characteristics and various sociocultural, historical and political realities of the various regions. These areas bring out the dissent in Commonwealth literature: slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and the contemporary realities of the various societies.

The question of dissent in Commonwealth Literature takes us to the characteristics given each region. These characteristics also reveal the areas of dissent. West Indian

literature treats the search for one, identity and culture. The Caribbean experience, though colonial as well, is unique and this uniqueness is reflected in its literature, making it *different* from all the other regions of the Commonwealth. Literature is in many ways a mirror of the society, of the trials tribulations and triumphs of a people.

Commonwealth Caribbean

The Caribbean Islands, especially those belonging to the Commonwealth, are a melting pot of cultures, peoples and languages. Their origins and the circumstances of their presence in these islands are well documented historical facts: victims of the Slave Trade forced into a marriage of sorts with people from different places, and the dwellers of the Caribbean archipelago facing an all-encompassing perennial identity crisis and problems of home. This is because apart from the indigenous population of the West Indies or the original inhabitants of the region, the Islands became increasingly populated, first by European settlers and plantation owners and then when the sugar plantation business became irresistibly profitable, drawing more and more Europeans to the Islands, who created sugarcane plantations in almost every accessible piece of land. The number of African slaves in the Islands grew proportionately. In Jamaica for instance, as Robert B. Kent writes:

In 1658, three years after the English had taken the island from Spain, the population consisted of 4,500 Europeans and 1,400 Africans. In 1673 there were 8,600 Europeans and 9,500 Africans. Then sugar took hold, and by 1754 there were 12,000 Europeans

and 86,500 Africans. Jamaica, like Barbados, had become, in terms of numbers, an African island.

This composition of the population invariably influenced the social structure of the islands after the achievement self-government or independence as the case may be. As Robert Kent argues demands for autonomy also had to do with race and colour, which had been central issues in the Caribbean for nearly five centuries, ever since the beginning of the African slave trade in the early 1500s. West Indian society inherited a social structure based on slavery, the plantation, and colonial rule. That structure had small white elite at the top; a small middle class of white and a few black people; and a large black base occupying the lowest economic class. Most whites were well off, socially secure, and educated, while most blacks were poor, often semiliterate, and underprivileged. In most cases, these blacks who happen to be the descendants of African slaves imported from the continent for the purposes of the sugarcane plantations were the most affected by the well-known Caribbean identity dilemma. This social reality forms the base of Caribbean or West Indian Literature, the literature of a people cut off from their roots and seeking to develop new roots in a foreign land. The hybrid population that emerges from this social mix is a reflection of a society seeking to remake itself from the bits and pieces of a hostile, violent, almost brutal era. It is on this basis that Carole Boyce Davies defines Caribbean Literature as: written and oral literature of the Caribbean from before the arrival of Europeans in the 15th century to the present. This literature, she further argues, emerged within a context of many languages and cultures. The languages of the Caribbean - French, English, Spanish, and Dutch - are remnants of the colonizing powers and their

historical encounters with the region. Creoles and local *patois* (hybrid languages) developed from the mixture of European languages with Native American languages, especially Carib and Arawak, and the languages of Africans brought to the Caribbean as slaves. Asians, primarily from India and China, and Middle Easterners also contribute to the region's cultural diversity.

This diversity can be observed in the works of prominent Commonwealth Caribbean writers like Nobel Laureate, Derek Walcott from Saint Lucia and Edward Kamau Brathwaite from Barbados. Walcott, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1992, is perhaps the Caribbean writer best known internationally. In addition to poetry, Walcott is well known as a playwright, most notably for his collection *Dream on Monkey Mountain, and Other Plays* (1970). His poetry collections include *In a Green Night* (1962), *Another Life* (1973), *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979), and *Omeros* (1990). The major themes that cut across these works are inspired from the historical events analysed above and Walcott's works can perfectly serve as a reference to the direction and/or orientation of Caribbean Commonwealth Literature in general. Common themes in West Indian literature are: homelessness, rootlessness, exile, migration, displacement, and questions of identity. The colonies were forced to believe that they were uncivilized and this resulted to low self esteem, lost of culture and rootlessness especially among the West Indians who were carried off their land for servitude in the Caribbean. The search for identity and homelessness preoccupies V.S. Naipaul's text *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The protagonist Mr. Biswas search not only for his identity but he is in search of search of a place he can call his own. Unlike the East, West and Southern African regions, the Caribbean Commonwealth experience that

informs its literary repertoire is rooted not in a single unifying culture, but in a coterie of socio-cultural tight spots and the major concern becomes the question of identity, home or the lack of it as well as the ever present political problems of most post-independence societies.

Like many other regions of the Commonwealth they share a common history of colonialism, political confrontations and crisis, and Diaspora. J. Michael Dash in *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* describes the Caribbean as “a metaphor for the human condition, characterized by unceasing change and creative discontinuity” (6). The creative writings functions as a mirror into the society since “these works’ portrayal of the socioeconomic conditions in the Caribbean” (Phillips 177). Silvio Torres-Saillant, in the *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature*, speaks of “fragmentation as coherence” and “epistemological separateness” as fundamental contexts for his “unity of Caribbean Literature” (1-54). Significant in these definitions are the usage of imagery and words of fragmentation, and of chaos, to describe Caribbean Literature and the Caribbean. Shelly Jarrett Bromberg in “Transcultural Complementarity in Fernando Ortiz’s *Contrapunteo Del Tabaco Y El Azúcar*” emphasizes that “Contemporary studies of Caribbean Literature often focus on the difficulties of defining this literature as a diverse yet unified set of discourses”(167). She makes clear that “This resistance against cultural essentialism or theoretical categorization by de-centering and multiplying the contexts and expressions of the Caribbean, however, is not simply another example of postmodern theory” (ibid). She further highlights Benítez Rojo argument in his book length meditation on the Caribbean, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern*

Perspective, of what use is a postmodern perspective to “a part of the world that hardly brushes against modernity” (152 qtd on Bromberg 167). It is in this wise that Carole Boyce Davies explains that:

The topics of Caribbean literature encompass the historical issues of enslavement and forced migration, the related themes of home and exile, and colonialism and decolonization. Caribbean literature also embraces the social and cultural themes of tradition, landscape, culture, and community, and addresses such universal questions as identity, sexuality, family life, pain, joy, and the uses of the imagination. (par.2)

Caribbean female writers also write on diverse themes. Sue N Greene informs on the topics speakers focused on at the Second International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers, which held at St. Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies in Trinidad in April 1990:

Michelle Cliff on “speechlessness”; Olive Senior on the “two worlds” of books and orality, on “capturing the sound of voice,” and on the “imperative” of writing; Erna Brodber on “finding a methodology for the West Indian experience”; Beryl Gilroy on “reconstructing” the fragmented interior lives of West Indian immigrants in Britain; Merle Hodge on Creole as the “mother tongue” and on the role of fiction in “validating reality”; Claire Harris on writing “for these people who were never going home” but were refusing to be “marginalized

in Canada; Dionne Brand on her grandmother who “grew me up”; Marion Patrick Jones on her mixed heritage (“I know exactly who I am”); Lorna Goodison on the tension between town and country and on becoming a poet when she “did not know anyone who was a poet”; Marlene Nourbese Philip on writing “from your own CALLALOO space”; Merle Collins on the perpetuation of imperialist values through education; Afua Cooper on the struggle of the woman writer (“Write this down, quick, because we leave soon”); Janice Shinebourne on Indian victimization and pride; Valerie Belgrave on “race harmony” and the historical romance—all of these personal comments re-emerged in the second conference as formal panels on identity, alienation, language, orality, roles, race, class, and gender and as multiple informal exchanges on these and a variety of related topics.(532-533)

This is a significant account of the themes that surround Caribbean women writers although they all explore the same themes like their male counterparts, their view of those themes deviate with a certain degree from that of the men. In this wise Greene cites, the Honorable Jennifer Johnson, Minister of Youth, Sport, Culture and Creative Arts in Trinidad and Tobago’s address at the opening ceremony of the conference. She articulates that Honourable Jennifer Johnson: “expressed the underlying assumption of the conference- that Caribbean women have their own view of reality and the world needs their view” (533) Greene further explains that:

Implied was the belief that their literature is essentially different from that of Caribbean males (and of women outside the Caribbean). In general, the conferees seemed to agree that in all matters the Caribbean female experience was different from the Caribbean male's, that although race, class, identity, and so on were commonalities, women experienced all of these in a way different from the way men experienced them. In other words, all other categories were subsumed under gender. (533)

Australia

Hartley Grattan defines Australian Literature as literature written by English-speaking inhabitants of the continent of Australia. Unlike the rest of Commonwealth Literature, Australian and Canadian literature do not focus so much on the experience of colonialism as on the natural environment and the place of the aborigines. This is perhaps because Canada and Australia are dominated by immigrants or settlers who trace their origins back to Britain. The original inhabitants of these countries have either been eliminated or bred out in the settler community. As Nicolas Peterson points out, Europeans began settling in Australia in 1788. Their impact on the indigenous population was devastating. Many Aboriginal people died from epidemics of European diseases or from fighting to retain control of their land. Only those inhabiting the most remote areas of the continent were able to continue their traditional way of life. By the early 1900s many Aboriginal people were reduced to an impoverished, sedentary life, either on their own lands at the fringe of urban areas or on government-established reserves. Many also grew dependent

on European society, which had little sympathy for them. Government assimilation policies, which sought to absorb Aboriginal people into white society, further eroded their culture.

However, Australian Literature has developed certain well-defined qualities: a love of the vast, empty land, with its unique flora and fauna, a compelling sense of the worth of the common people, and freedom from the bondage of European traditions. Although the English language has not been radically transformed in Australia, it has undergone distinctive changes of style with colourful additions to vocabulary, about which Australians were once apologetic but which are now regarded as a dynamic and valuable contribution to the language. Indeed, several studies of Australian transformations of the English language have appeared.

It was in Australia that England dumped “its overflow of convicts” (Edelson xiv). Thus many Australian writers make use of the convict and prison theme. “Convicts and their guards, a special corps of military police, made up the community” (Edelson xiv). Thus survival becomes another theme. Other themes include conflict with aborigines who refuse to accept their land loss, rebellion, journey, departure, return, exile, displacement, national identity, Australia landscape, oppression, sheep raising etc. The very first Australian novel is a convict narrative- *Quintus Servinnnton*, a tale Founded Upon Incidents of Real Occurrence” (ibid). South Australia was not a penal colony, “had a high percentage of landowners and was the only Australian colony with no connection to convicts” (xvi). The bush is also another theme in Australian literature. Edelson states that “it was in the 1890s and early 1900s, the golden age of Australian Literature, that the bush came to the fore as the predominant image” (xviii).

The bush profile became the national profile. Henry Lawson is the father of the Australian Short story. He wrote “The Drover’s Wife” where the bush becomes representative of a place where ‘danger is always constant and isolation unrelieved’ (opcit 1). Australian writers also portray the nation’s political and cultural independence profile. The literature of Australia also chronicles experiences such as agitation for female suffrage, the new nationalism, the World War 1, the depressions of the 1920s and 1930s, the impact of world war 11, displacement, cultural disruption, justice and land rights, racist stereotypes, national identity, amongst others.

Commonwealth West Africa

It is the easy thing to do, to give in to the popular belief that the British colonial rule in the African regions of the commonwealth would have produced the same results and by extension, the same literature. However, the experience was not the same in the West, East and Southern African regions. In West Africa, the colonial master saw the colonies as “gold mines” and sources of power for as long as they lasted. This explains the Indirect Rule policy and the presence of none but the colonial administrators whose principal objective - unstated though - was to exploit the natural resources with the use of the human resources available. The development of schools and other social amenities was part of this grand project. The relationship between the colonised and the coloniser was shaped by these goals and the will to attain them. Such is the experience that informs the works of renowned West African Commonwealth writers like Chinua Achebe (*Arrow of God, Things Fall Apart, Anthills of the Savannah*), Wole Soyinka (*Death and the King’s Horseman*, and much of his poetry), Ayi

Kwei Armah, Kenjo Jumbam and a host of others. It goes without saying that the colonial experience shaped the aftermath of colonial rule. Thus, neo-colonialism, dictatorship and the general post-independence malaise and disillusionment that characterise much of postcolonial Commonwealth literature in West Africa can be traced to colonial rule. Such concerns are the focus of such works as *A Man of the People*, *The Beautiful Ones Are not yet Born*, *Across the Mongolo*. West African literature deals with the Postcolonial novel which discusses the clash of cultures, new-colonialism, capitalism, cultural conflict, gender, racial segregation, poverty, and hybridity just to name a few. In this case, the politics of commonwealth literature have to do with the strategies that give rise to different interpretations or stories of the past. The stories of the past are discussed in historical myth, racism, segregation, economic exploitation, religious affairs and social discrimination as a result of class distinction (<http://jcl.sagepub.com/cgi/feedback> par.6).

East Africa

In the East African region, much like West Africa, colonial intrusion left scars that continue to preoccupy postcolonial East African writers. However, unlike West Africa where the colonial master was that ever distant, almost an elusive figure whose presence was *felt* rather than *seen*, to the East Africans, the colonial master was the unwanted neighbour in the backyard, encroaching and then gradually grabbing all their best lands. Thus the settlement of whites in Kenya during colonial rule and the ensuing discrimination and land appropriation issues led to the Mau Mau uprising which constitutes a major concern of postcolonial literary figures like Ngugi Wa Thiongo' whose second novel *The River Between*

(1965), had as its background the Mau Mau rebellion (1952-1956), in which a group of the Kikuyu people began a campaign of violence against the British, who controlled Kenya at the time. This subject reappears in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), a novel in which Mau Mau bloodshed is set against the celebrations of Kenyan independence. The publication of Ngugi's next novel, *Petals of Blood* (1977), a story about the poor quality of life in East Africa, particularly for Kenya's lower classes, even after independence from the United Kingdom in 1963, led to his detention in 1978 under Kenya's Public Security Act. He recounted his prison experience in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981). The play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (1977; *I Will Marry When I Want*, 1982) held that those who had fought the hardest for independence had gained the least, a theme Ngugi returned to in the novel *Matigari* (1989). Thus, the struggle for independence which was greatly influenced by the appropriation of land and the pauperisation of the East African populace turned out to be the major characteristics of that literature.

South Africa

The Southern African region has a similar land appropriation problem as East Africa, but the parallel racial discrimination initiated by the apartheid regime and which ended up spreading throughout the region has overshadowed the land issue in the literature of this region. In other words, the distribution of land reflected the racial patterns in the region as the white minority. As David Hunt argues, from 1960 to the mid-1970s, the government attempted to make apartheid a policy of "separate development." Blacks were consigned to newly created and impoverished homelands, called *Bantustans*, which were designed to eventually become petty sovereign states. The

white population retained control of more than 80 percent of the land. Increasing violence, strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations by opponents of apartheid, and the overthrow of colonial rule by blacks in Mozambique and Angola, forced the government to relax some of its restrictions. White minority rule in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe and the Republic of South Africa, and the consequent institutionalisation of racism form the core of southern African Commonwealth Literature which is also sometimes referred to as *protest literature*.

South African Literature deals with the issue of apartheid. Apartheid means “separateness” in Afrikaans. It was a system of racial segregation in South Africa from 1948 and was dismantled in a series of negotiations from 1990 to 1993 culminating in democratic elections in 1994. In this form of government people are legally classified into racial groups – the main ones were blacks, whites, coloured and Indians and separated from one another on the basis of legal classification and unequal rights. This policy manifested through a number of Acts aimed at checking racial freedom, human rights and the settlement of blacks. The effects of the apartheid laws and their negative ramifications on the characters are documented in texts like J.M Coetzee *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Disgrace*, Athol Fugard *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, Doris Lessing *The Grass is Singing*, Nadine Gordimer *The Pick Up*, *Julys People*, *None To accompany Me* and Pamela Jooste *Dance With a Poor Man’s Daughter*. *The Pick Up* focuses on the acts which ensured white supremacy in every domain of the South African society. For Example the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 prohibited marital union between persons of different races. This law is reflected in *Maru* when Maru loves Margaret Cadmore Jr. but cannot go closer to her. He elopes with her during the night when nobody sees them. His elopement with

the Masarwa girl becomes a scandal the next day when the villagers hear of it.

Also, the Immorality Act of 1950 made it clear that it was a criminal offence for a white person to have any sexual relation with a person of a different race. Thus in *The Grass Is Singing* the newspaper report states that Moses murders Mary Turner while trying to steal her Jewellery instead of saying it was because of Mary rejecting his love.

On the 27 of April 1950, the Group Area Act was passed. This law partitioned the country into different parts, with different areas being allocated to different racial groups. This act represented the very heart of Apartheid because it was the basis upon which political and social separation was to be constructed as evident in Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Also, the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 created separate government structures for black people while the reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 prohibited people of different races from using the same public amenities. From these two Acts we see that everything was shared. Transport facilities, schools, hospitals, churches, restaurants and many other facilities were segregated. Black people had their own facilities which were inferior to those of the white people. Head said her second novel *Maru* was a thesis against racialism.

.... But I didn't use a black white theme like black man versus Whiteman. I used my own theme to work out what I'd say was a kind of universal thesis on racialism. That's mostly the base of *Maru*. It is an examination of racial prejudices but I used black against black instead of whites against black. (5)

From the quotation, it is clear that Head's *Maru* is about apartheid government and its ills.

Canada

Canadian Literature is largely informed by the predicament of the Native population or the so-called original inhabitants of North America. As Patricia Smart et al argue the works of late-20th-century indigenous Canadian writers Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) and Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* (1985), explore in harrowing detail the social obstacles and racist stigmas facing indigenous peoples in Canada. Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983), is a Métis woman's first-person narrative of alienation and traumatization in racist white Canadian society. Jennifer Henderson informs that "The text has been read as an unliterary autobiographical document, valuable only for its social significance" (Henderson 803). Henderson cites Thompson argument that "Culleton's narrative subverts the mimetic and expressive presuppositions of the genre of autobiography, through the paradoxical inscription of an oral narrative in written form". Moreover she demonstrates that that as one of First Nations women's texts, "*In Search of April Raintree* asks to be read as an event in which truth is unfolded in and as provisional interpretation"(803).

Patricia Smart et al further state that Novels, stories, and essays, by Basil Johnston, Lee Maracle, Alootook Ipellie, Ian Ross, and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias present strong perspectives on indigenous communities, language and identity, and cultural autonomy. Thomas King's novels *Medicine River* (1990) and *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), as well as his collection of stories *One Good Story, That One* (1993), combine deadpan humour with provocative

commentary on the racial and social misidentifications inherent in North American stereotypes of native peoples. King dissects the mentality behind these dated stereotypes, encouraging a wry celebration of the contradictions that shape a person's sense of self and place. Many of his stories question the artificiality of national and cultural borders ("Canadian Literature").

Canadian Literature on identity is based on place. In the introduction to *A Sense of Place*, Herb Wyile et al observe that, "For most North Americans, identity is a complex mix of a feeling of community, a shared cultural, ethnic, and social background, and an attachment to place – a mix that is much more localized than the feeling of being Canadian or being American" (ix). Bonita Wheeler in "A Discussion of the Reaffirmation of Place-Myths in Wayne Johnston's *Baltimore's Mansion and the Colony of Unrequited Dreams*" also explains that: "A country the size of Canada with such diversity in ethnicity with a vastly multicultural population cannot be easily typified by its literature, so that readers would be hard pressed to identify a piece of writing as distinctly Canadian" (12). Wyile et al go on to cite Nicholas Entrikin's definition of place found in "In the Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity": Place presents itself to us as a condition of human experience. As agents in the world we are always 'in place', much as we are always 'in culture'. For this reason our relations to place and culture become elements in the construction of our individual and collective identities" (Wyile et al ix). This view falls in line with new historicism that argues that a writer cannot be separated from his social milieu. Bonita Wheeler further cites Flemming Brahm in "Entering our own Ignorance: Subject-Object

Relations in Commonwealth Literature” quotes from Margaret Atwood’s book, *Survival*:

The tendency in Canada ... has been to emphasize the personal and the universal but to skip the national or the cultural ... Canadian literature ... [is] made by people living in a particular space at a particular time, and you can recognize that more easily if the space and the time are your own. (Atwood 1972 cited in Brahm 69)

New Zealand

The question of national identity is also a recurrent predicament to New Zealand writers since the middle of the nineteenth century (Mark Williams 1990, 9-10). New Zealand Literature is “characterized by a strong sense of pride in what pioneers and settlers had achieved in a strange and hostile land. Familiar themes in histories as well as literature revolved around the distinctive landscape and nostalgic reflections on an empty land with a “dying [Maori] race,” but at the same time there was a sense of optimism about progress toward a modern nation-state”(Suzanne Romaine 31-32). In novels of the 1970s and 1980s, however, Mark Williams further distinguishes a “deep-seated unease” about the country’s cultural situation. Romaine writes that Williams: claimed that at no time since the 1930s has fiction in New Zealand been so directly involved with crucial and unresolved questions of national self-definition and evaluation as in the late 1980s. The flourishing of Maori artistic, cultural, and political expression that began in the 1970s has since become known as the Maori Renaissance. During this time a significant body of fiction written in English by Maori novelists such as Patricia Grace, Keri Hulme, and

Witi Ihimaera began to emerge. The appearance of these works heralded a significant shift in New Zealand's literary tradition, from its Eurocentric foundations to a postcolonial perspective that privileges the "insider" or indigenous point of view (see, eg, Grace 1978, in which she argued for a national literature in English that includes the Maori point of view). This transformation is part of a much wider movement throughout the Pacific and beyond (32). In New Zealand literature we find the past re-enacted and the construction of national identity (Witi Ihimaera's historical novel *The Matriarch* (1986)). Suzanne Romaine argues that *The Matriarch* "presents a new vision that seeks to displace Pakeha discourse from its privileged position in articulating the country's history and national identity" and "validates a Maori version of nationhood" (31).

Commonwealth Literature is a literature of delegitimation and protest that touches on issues of corruption, race and colour, domination, exploitation, and alienation, identity, exile, frustration, and cultural nationalism. It is a literature about the experiences, societal concerns, fear and values of the peoples who share a common historical heritage with the United Kingdom. Therefore, their literature offers one of the most important ways in which these former colonies express their perceptions and experience such that their socio-cultural, political, religious, economic and historical realities are profoundly represented.

Salman Rushdie, the West Indian versatile writer simply puts it thus "The Empire Writes Back to the Centre" where "Empire" stands for the sum total of British colonies lost during independence, while the "Centre" refers to Britain. The empire writing back to the centre is in a bid to assert their identity and bring out their socio-economic and cultural

realities and experiences. After colonial rule came independence. The colonial masters in spite of their granting independence to their former colonies still thought these colonies were unfit to manage their economies. Thus, in their eye, democracy was a far-fetched concept to their citizens (the colonised). Consequently, according to this, self-governance with guidance was the best option they chose. The result of this type of independence to post-colonial Africa has led to so many negative repercussions amongst which are unrepresentative political institutions, tyrants in power, misappropriation of state funds and corruption. It is against this back drop that most African writers base their writings in a bid to satirize both the colonialists, neocolonialists and elite rulers.

It is on this backdrop of entrapment and social misfit that writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'O, Ali Mazuri, Derek Walcott, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, Edward Brathwaite, Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Yvonne Vera, Edwidge Danticat, Isidore Okpewho, Bole Butake, Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood, Anita Desai, Buchi Emecheta, Bate Besong, Alobwed'Epie, John Nkengasong, amongst others attempt to redefine and situate the image of the colonised in his estranged world. They strive to retell the original story as against the misrepresentation of the coloniser/imperialist. They tend to opine that every society has a story embedded in its background and this story most often than not shapes the culture and identity of the people. So in essence the coloniser cannot claim that the colonised was void of a culture and tradition before their arrival. Rather the colonisers in their imperialist and selfish objectives stripped the colonised of his heritage forcing him to believe that he had no culture to show before their arrival. The colonised was seen from the

perspective of the “Other” – an inferior being /race who had to open up and learn from the civilised master, the coloniser. This misrepresentation of the colonised resulted in the loss of his self esteem. As counter discourses, some of the literature counters what has been written by colonial masters whom they consider as misrepresentation and exaggerations.

Thumboo and Kandiah adequately point out: “No human community or culture or endeavor is homogenous as specific historical or personal particularities of its participating members dispose them to follow different leads and pursue different paths” (22). These dissenting views will certainly provide the basis for new thinking that will enable us arrive at a better and more meaningful understanding of ‘others’ perspectives.

From the above perspective, it can be argued that far from hailing a common concern or having a uniform orientation, the different literatures from the different regions of the Commonwealth, reflect, each in its own right, unique features or characteristics seen in the themes or concerns of the writers, the language and ultimately the style that is the product of these features. It goes without saying that these differences are shaped by their different historical experiences.

This is not however to say that Commonwealth Literature does not exist. There is of course the ever-present British rule that affects all of that literature, the recurrent identity problems that cut across all the regions of the Commonwealth (even if they vary in scale), and the general experience of colonialism that brings to mind the subgenre, Postcolonial Literature. To conclude, we can state with certainty that Commonwealth literature is a discursive domain within which different voices contend with each other, articulating varying and sometimes opposing views in their

response to parameters that may be used to define it. Some of these we have raised in this chapter are the controversy inherent in the term “Commonwealth Literature”.

CRITICAL ESSAYS

CHAPTER FOUR

History and Colonialism in Commonwealth Literature

In general, literature is dynamic because of diverse experiences. The colonial experience and its aftermath have always been a source of inspiration for most Commonwealth writers who through memory, either recreate the sad events of the time or look upon the present predicament as a direct consequence of that historical colonial experience. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* remarks that “Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in the interpretations of the present” (3). Vinay Dharwadker states that: “Literatures and literary cultures are located in history most often at the intersection of multiple, crisscrossing histories (95)”. Commenting on the relationship between literature, history and society, Ngugi wa Thiong’o affirms that literature does not develop in a vacuum. According to him literature “is given impetus, shape, benita direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society” (*Writers in Politics*, XV). This shows his inclination on the fact that the relationship between a given society and its literature cannot be ignored in a proper critical appraisal. The society, in this case, refers to the people, their heritage, laws, traditions and way of life. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* defines history as the story of the past. We are informed that “The subject is traditionally divided into ancient, medieval and modern periods and often classified according to countries or regions” (525). *Harraps Chambers English Dictionary* defines history as “an account, an event: a

systematic account of the origin and progress of the world, a nation and institution” (176). *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines history as “the whole trend of events connected with a nation or country, person (1247). Sarah Anyang Agbor in “Memory and History in Alobwed’Epie’s *The Death Certificate*” states that history can be viewed as a continuum consisting of a past, a present and a future all inseparably linked together. Notably, Tejumola Olaniyan in his article entitled “History as Culture: the Romance of Adam” cites Walcott’s two ideas of history: “... history that arraigns and judges in absolute terms” and “... History as myth that shuns this groveling submission to the paralyzing grip of historic time” (97). In this vein Ton Lemaire proffers that writing is charged with the ambivalence of progress and as such: “History has been from the beginning, an accomplice in hiding the history of Others” (qtd. Mineke Schipper 152). John Peck and Martin Coyle in *Literary Terms and Criticism* hold that:

The boundaries between History and Literature have become fluid and open, so that for the historian, texts increasingly represent a major source of information about the lived realities of a period, just as for the literary critic historical ‘background’ has become a text to be read --- such fine interplay between History and Literature however is characteristic of current criticism as it endlessly re-examines and questions the basis of our understanding of Literature and its contexts. (202)

Furthermore New Historicists believe that:

Literature is historical which means in its exhibition that literature is not primarily the record of one mind's attempt to solve certain formal problems...to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produce it... Literature must be assimilated to history... History is a series of "ruptures" between ages and men. The historian is trapped in his own historicity... (G.D. Myers *The Literary Project* 6).

The new historicists insist that the relationship between history and literature is seen as dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as a product and producer, end and source of history. In line with the above, we shall examine the chosen texts as reflections of the past that influence the present. The new historicists argue that there is a connection between literature and the societies that produce it. Thus their works can be considered extended metaphors and a reading and interpretation of these societies. History will be used in this work to delineate how the past is very important to the understanding of the present in the selected texts.

Significantly, throughout history, colonialism has often been considered in terms of power relations. Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Post-colonialism* defines colonialism "as the forceful takeover of land and economy" (20). In his own study, Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, described colonialism as "the a one armed bandit". He explains that colonialism more than anything else, underdeveloped Africa in all domains" (244). The colonised societies became both physically and psychologically "disabled", the people

were practically deprived of their own sovereignty (ibid.). Benita Parry defines colonialism as “a specific, and the most spectacular, mode of imperialism’s many and mutable states, one which preceded the rule of international finance capitalism and whose formal ending imperialism has survived” (34). John McLeod states that “colonialism is a particular historical manifestation of imperialism, specific to certain places and times”(8). In the same vein, Elleke Boehmer defines colonialism as “the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands” (2). From these definitions, we realise that when colonialism takes place, there is economic interest (Parry 34), settlement and exploitation (Boehmer 2) and “the unequal relations of power which colonialism constructs” (John McLeod 8). In this light, Tunde Adegbola in his article entitled “Globalisation: Colonizing Space Flows” insists that colonialism is “the manner in which a state claims sovereignty over territory and people outside its own boundaries, often to facilitate economic dominance over their resources, labor and markets” (5). He further explains that:

...Needless to state that the domination goes beyond the economic sphere. In the process of gaining economic dominance, political dominance becomes necessary. Political dominance calls for cultural dominance to the degree that the colonized become mere caricatures of themselves. (5)

Colonialism thus is a concept that describes how states or world powers like Britain, USA, France, Spain, or Germany claim sovereignty over territory and people outside their own boundaries in order to have supremacy over that country’s /

territory's political and economic resources. Moreover the colonial masters superimpose their own culture on the people to subdue them. It has always been a question of a superior power dominating a weaker or inferior one. This is the memory that the colonised keeps and passes on from generation to generation. Hence, the Caribbean novelist George Lamming emphasises:

The colonial experience is a live experience in the consciousness of the people ...The experience is a continuing psychic experience that has to be dealt with and will have to be dealt with long after the actual colonial situation finally "ends". (qtd in Loomba 185)

John McLeod argues in *Beginning Postcolonialism* that colonialism was certainly dependent upon the use of force and physical coercion, but did not depend on force alone without the existence of a set of beliefs that were held to justify the possession and continuing occupation of other people's land (37). The violation of 'local' identities and the imposition of the colonialists' culture on the colonised put the latter in the position of identity crisis as he is forced to confront his oppressor with nothing but the same tools he has been given by the oppressor, one of which is language. As Jamaica Kincaid rightly observes that the colonised have no choice than to confront the colonialist with his own language since they have no language of their own after the experience of cultural rape.

The regions of the Commonwealth have had their lives reshaped by the experience and history of colonialism and slavery. The British colonised parts of Commonwealth and introduced a colonialist ideology. Yet colonialist ideology has

a completely different take on the history of colonialism. As a United States senator once argued in the nineteenth century:

No human event, past or present ... promises more beneficent change upon earth than the arrival of the van of the Caucasian race upon the border of the sea which washes the shore of the eastern Asia. The Mongolian, or Yellow race, is there, four hundred million in number, spreading almost to Europe; a race once the foremost of the human family in the arts of civilization, but torpid and stationary for thousands of years. It is a race far above the Ethiopian, or black – above the Malay, or Brown,-- and above the American Indian or red: it is a race far above all these but still far below the white, and, like the rest, must receive an impression from the superior race when they come in contact...The white race alone receives the divine command to subdue and replenish the earth. (*The Dark and Tangled Path: Race in America* 96)

Definitely, the above quotation attests the superiority of the ‘white’ race over any other race. Talking about the British in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Elleke Boehmer says:

As well known, the Victorians had a genius for fashioning moral ideals which matched their economic need. They stapled duty on to interest, Christianity on profit. Enterprise it was believed, would secure the happiness, prosperity and salvation of dark tribes sunk in barbarism. (36)

Even in giving European education to Indians in 1835, Macaulay thought it would be a sign of encouraging civilised behaviour but more especially it made trading easier among former “savages” (ibid. 36). So, contrary to the humanitarian reasons that they advanced for the educational schemes in India, the real motive behind the endeavour was the economic one. The civilising mission also had ulterior motives that were not always explained as such. Elleke Boehmer quotes the British liberal J. A. Hudson as saying:

The main aim behind colonial expansion is financial interest; even where these were generated by groups with mixed motives, such as politicians philanthropists, the motor power of imperialism may have been provided by section interests, but its “governor” was the struggle for profitable markets. (37)

Such is the kind of thinking that pushed colonialism to the extremes for which it is known today. Given that it was a movement that dealt with human relationships and sought to define human identity from a unique and supposedly superior perspective, its impact on the cultural identity of the people so defined is obvious. Colonialists believed that the ‘superior’ race (superior race was associated to superior power) should rule over, and decide for the inferior because the latter lacked the inherent capacity for logical and critical thinking.

The experiences of colonialism vary from region to region; some suffer the loss of culture, the loss of power over their land, the loss of a voice, the loss of religion, and above all the loss of the self. Flemming Brahm states that imperialism and racism have given way to neo-colonialism and in-house

fighting characterised by classicism, ethnicity and an exclusion of the less privileged from the political, economic and social domains. Expanding the same idea, Flemming Brahm in “Entering Our Own Ignorance; Subject – Object Relations in Commonwealth literature,” writes:

Living in any Commonwealth colony is profoundly different from living in Britain or any other country in the Old World. As a group the commonwealth nations, however different they may be, share the experience of colonialism and its subsequent developments. Their histories vary, but they always need to be understood in terms of a dependence upon the imperial centre and later movement towards independence. The different patterns of these social fabrics are all woven upon the common warp of a striving towards political, cultural and economic self-reliance.... Much of the literature produced in the Commonwealth deals with the nature of this newness and the effect it has upon the people living in these countries. (66)

Anne McClintock’s assertion that “imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of domestic space” illustrates contemporary critical awareness that colonialism cannot be considered only in terms of “public” structures, such as the nation or city, but must also be debated in terms of its construction through the private lives of both colonizer and colonized (17).

The place of history in Commonwealth Literature also highlights a focus of dissent. Herb Wyile in “Speculative

Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History” points out that:

How history is theorized, defined and practiced, therefore, has been dramatically reconfigured. Profound doubts have been raised about various aspects of the authority of history: as a discipline with a particular methodology, as a scientific discourse aspiring to objectivity, and as a narrative of the past. (7-8)

Despite the shared history of slave trade, slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism the experiences of the regions are not the same. E.W. Blyden in his book *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* criticises the Europeans continuous Eurocentric view of Africa. He says:

The mistake which Europeans often make in considering questions of Negro improvement and future of Africa, is supposing that the Negro is the European in embryo, in the undeveloped stage and that when, by and by he shall enjoy the advantages of civilisation and culture, he will become like the European, in other words, that the Negro is on the same line of progress in the same groove with the Europeans but infinitely in the rear. (qtd in Keith Booker 10)

The African is considered a child with an underdeveloped brain and inferior to other races, a view that then goes to explain the colonialism and ‘justifies’ it from the perspective of the colonisers. In other words the inferiority of the colonised was

written on everything about him; his body, colour, culture, language and worldview. All of that had to be ‘corrected’ through colonialism. R.H Lyons has this to say:

Though they did disagree among themselves about which European “races” were inferior to others. Western racial commentators generally agreed that blacks were inferior to whites in moral fiber, cultural attainment and mental eyes the child family of modern man in embryo. (qtd in Booker Keith, 10)

The European believed that the people, fauna and flora of Africa belonged to a remote age. It is wrong for the colonisers to believe they are superior or that England should be the centre. Their superiority or claim to it is their own idea which is a far cry from what is; the reality of the non-essentiality of race or any other such physical traits of identification.

Commonwealth Caribbean

The Commonwealth Caribbean (West Indian region) has produced a set of writers whose topicality and historical complexities need not be overstated. Hilary McD. Beckles declares that “Conceptually, *The Black Jacobins and Capitalism and Slavery* situate the Caribbean as the primordial site of Atlantic modernity, and as one of several important locations where its contradictory tendencies were acted out as ideological contest” (777). Writing has a purging effect for the West Indian writer. In Wilson Nana Tagoe’s *Historical Thoughts and Representation in West Indian Literature*, James emphasises the importance of history to the West Indian. He asserts that:

We of the Caribbean are people more than any other people, constituted by history and therefore any attempt not only to analyse but to carry out political or social activities in connection with ourselves and in mind how we came into being, where we have reached, who we are and what we are. We were brought from African and thrown into a highly developed modern industry and highly developed language... we are dealing with concrete matters that penetrate *A Small Place* into the very immediate necessity of a social existence. (19)

Caribbean history can be traced back to Christopher Columbus discovery of the West Indies in 1492. The true natives of the islands, the American Indians such as the Caribs or the Arawaks, were all but wiped out by the colonisation process of the 16th and 17th centuries. Christopher O'reilly informs that these islands were initially inhabited by the Arawak Indians who were already facing extinction due to diseases and the ferocious wars fought by the colonial masters in their struggle to control this area (32). This is clearly evident in in which the small island of Antigua has been completely usurped and plundered by colonial greed: "The Europeans got rich on the native's free and unvalued labour and property" (10). Thus the people and the country are impoverished. What Kincaid tries to capture in her depiction of the country is the contrast between the wealth that is and the misery of the people that live in that wealth.

It is as a result of the claim of superiority by the English (colonisers) that Jamaica Kincaid says in *A Small Place*: "they should never have left their precious home, their precious England, a place they loved so much, a place they had to leave

but could never forget” (24). For why would anybody leave a good place to live among savages? But Kincaid even claims that the English were bad people when she says. “For they so enjoyed behaving badly as if there was pleasure immeasurable to be had from not acting as human beings” (28). In fact the idea of England being superior and the centre has been debunked by Kincaid in *A Small Place* especially when she calls the British the ‘bad-minded English’. Kincaid further expresses the poor behaviour of the English who regard themselves as not only the centre but civilised in *Lucy*: “I had just begun to notice that people who knew the correct way to do things such as hold a teacup, put food on a fork and bring it to the front of their dress - they were the people responsible for the most misery” (99).

The history of slavery and colonialism in the West Indies is overwhelming. Albert Ashaolu states that “the West Indies has a long tradition of slave rebellion, characterised by bloodshed and mass murder of the slaves” (149). Walcott in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* portrays the effects of colonialism on the life of the West Indian. Wilson Togae asserts that: “...the history of slavery and colonialism... presents an image of the West Indian as a victim rather than a creator of history...writers have ... had to struggle to transcend “history” and reconstruct new identities ...”(4). This accentuates the impact of colonialism on the Caribbean. The Old Man symbolises the colonial masters who have victimised and extorted the physical and economic essence of the Caribbean. The experiences of the three Jeans also highlight three different stages of slavery. Bruce King like Walcott emphasises that:

The Caribbean Blackman is seen in three stages of response to white power, from slave (and other)

violent rebellions (Gros Jean), through the attempt to master the white man's book learning (Ti-Jean), to the ultimate triumph of small man (petites gens-little people) combining force and native intelligence. (157)

Walcott reveals:

In the New World servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters. Because this literature serves as truth... The same awe of history possesses poets of the third world who think of language as enslavement and who in a rage of identity, respect, incoherence or nostalgia. (qtd in *Postcolonial* 371)

Walcott uses Corporal to satirise white perception of black and the consequent enslavement of the latter. In bitter satire of Christian religion which was brought by whites, and which preached the equality of man, he consciously puts the black man out of the scheme of things in terms of his humanity in order to make a mockery of white hypocrisy and imagined superiority. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* Corporal describes the unfortunate life of the black man in this excerpt:

In the beginning was ape and the ape had no name so God called him man. Now there were various tribes of the apes, it had gorillas, baboons, orang-atan, chimpanzee, the black arsed monkey and the

marmoset, and God looked at his homework and saw that it was good. For some of the apes had strengthened their backbone, and started walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger. (216-217)

He uses the storytelling tradition to give the reasons for the marginalisation of blacks. The derogatory term “nigger” segregates and afflicts “That unfortunate Tribe” known as the African. This leads to racism. Patrick Colm Hogan says *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is a play “that explores-through a narrative dialectic...-the various ways in which racism defines an unlivable identity for oppressed people, an identity that pushes toward madness”(45). Biodun Jeyifo in “On Eurocentric Critical Theory: Some Paradigms from the Texts and Sub Texts of Post – Colonial Writings” states that *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *Pantomime* are paradigmatic deconstructions of Eurocentricism. He argues that *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is a “perfect formalistic vehicle for a drama which seeks the epistemic deconstruction of texts and signs of Eurocentricism” (382). The play dramatises the falsity and pitfalls of the decolonization claim of Nativism. The play can be considered as an example of protest literature which Walcott uses to condemn Eurocentricism.

Like *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *Ti Jean and His Brothers* is described as a parable of mankind’s various confrontations with the devil. The devil here is a reference to the colonial master. The play exposes the relationship between the black, (represented by the three Jeans) and the white devil (symbolised by Planter). The relationship is that of exploitation and oppression institutionalised by slavery. He describes the three brothers’ rebellion against the Whiteman as any revolt

against any authoritarian or tyrannical government (Albert Ashaolu 149). West Indians were taken from their roots into slavery in European plantations. George Lamming affirms this:

What the West Indian shares with the Africans is a common political predicament, a predicament which we call colonial; but the word colonial has a deeper meaning for the West Indian than it has for the African. The African, in spite of his modernity has never been wholly severed from the cradle of a continuous culture. (34)

Caryl Phillips' *Higher Ground* and *Crossing the River* are all novels that deal with slavery. In *Crossing the River* the father/narrator sells his children into slavery because of poverty. His action is "A desperate foolishness. The crops failed I sold my children" (1). The man sells three children into slavery, Nash, Martha and Travis. Despite the abolition of slavery discrimination in the form of racism and colour prejudice persists in the US. For example in Martha's narrative in *Crossing the River* issues about slave trade, identity loss, suffering and despair are portrayed. The story spans two hundred and fifty years. She journeys to the West in search of some form of freedom, but apparently that search instead leads her to greater pain and the anguish of memories of the past. The narrator comments: "Her journey had been a long one. But now the sun had set. Her course was run" (73). The sun's settings suggest the end of the day, the coming of the night. But for Martha it is the end of the road for her. Hence her lament: "Father why has thou forsaken me?" (73). Martha is sold into slavery and separated from her child; auctioned like rams and goats :

The auctioneer beckons forward the traders. They look firstly at the men. A trader prods Lucas' biceps with a stick. If a trader buys a man, it is down the river. To die. That much we all know. The families in need of domestics, or the farmers in need of breeding wenches, they look across at us and wait their turn. I am too old for breeding. They do not know that I would also. My Eliza Mae holds on to me, but it will be to no avail. She will be a prime purchase. And on her own she stands a better chance of a fine family. I want to tell her this, to encourage her to let her go, but I have not the heart. I look on. The auctioneer cries to the heavens. (77)

The passage above defines Martha's sufferings and her present state of mind. This is how lives are separated and families lose ties. Her predicament is an extended metaphor for the greater predicament of the entire colonised people of Africa and the Caribbean and elsewhere around the world.

South Africa

In South Africa, Apartheid was a system of government that separated the white minority from the black majority and it is through this system of apartheid that colonialism was enforced. The nationalist party headed by Dr.D.F Malan put in place three hundred and seventeen laws voted in 1948. Bills were passed that hindered the social, economic and political liberties of the oppressed Africans and increased racial segregation to the advantage of the whites. Coetzee in *Waiting for the Barbarians* writes an archive of the inhumane treatment meted out to blacks and the downfall of the imperialist empire. The Magistrate who is the main narrator in the novel questions the

injustice of the whites against the blacks (barbarians)-victims, brutally killed and the women violated and the forceful occupation of the peoples land for the wealth of Europe.

The quest for land and wealth has always been the preoccupation of the colonial masters in Africa. The infringement of the European into Africa leads to political, social and economic domination of the Africans. Apartheid began in South Africa after the arrival of the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope in 1662. Horger and Byrne explain that Cape of Good Hope was used as a re-supply station established by the Dutch East India Company VOC (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie) for its fleet traveling between Holland and its empire in South and south East Asia (par. 5). Horger and Byrne further explain that, at the time, the company was not interested in expanding European settlement across Africa, but only in acquiring goods (fresh water, foodstuffs, replacement masts) to re-supply their ships. Their arrival sparked racial conflicts because the indigenous people known as the Khoikhoi refused to provide these goods on the terms set by the company, which forced the Europeans to stand up against the people driving them into the interior.

Three major factors led to the institutionalisation of the apartheid system of administration: Trade, Land, and mineral deposits. The Dutch trade with India in the 14th and 15th centuries led to the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 by Bartholomeu Diaz and a Dutch settlement was created. More labourers were needed to assist in building wharves and ware houses. The Khoikhoi people who are the indigenous people refused to labour for the Dutch because of the low wages and harsh conditions. Moreover they were unwilling to sell their farm products at the prices offered by the Dutch

Company (Worger par. 20). Worger states that the Dutch took three measures in 1650 as a consequence of the indigenous resistance to be exploited by the VOC:

First, the VOC decided to import slaves to meet local labor needs, and it maintained that policy for more than 100 years. Second, the VOC decided to free some of the employees from their contracts and to allow them to establish farms of their own to supply the Dutch fleets thereby giving rise to local settler population. Third, to supply the needs of the fleets as well as of the growing local population, the Dutch expanded ever farther into the lands of the Khoikhoi engaging in a series of wars that, together with the effects of the imported diseases, disseminated the indigenous population. (Worger par. 20)

The above measures created a fast expanding and racially stratified society. Moreover settlers invaded indigenous lands to acquire slaves for labour, especially from East Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, and South East Asia (Worger par. 22). This accounts for the multi-racial constitution and the racial discrimination of South Africa today.

Significantly the British seized the Cape Colony from the VOC in 1795 and engaged in warfare against the Xhosas seizing their lands. Five thousand British-assisted immigrants settled on small holder farms. Their settling in indigenous areas led to land crisis. In *None to Accompany Me*, Gordimer documents this rivalry over land. That is why Vera Stark Foundation tries reclaiming indigenous land. The Dutch settlers represented by the character of Mr Odendaal a Dutch

landowner, declares his strong resistance to land reclamation. He states vehemently:

Odensville is my township that's not yet declared, nobody is living in Odensville, nobody. All those people are trespassers and the only thing I'm going to tell you, lady ... I'm going to get them off my land, I'm going to burn down their rubbish, and you can go back yourself and tell them I'm not just talking. I'm not just talking at all to you. I've got the men to do it with me, we know how to get it done, alright and if they want to get in the way, that's their funeral. (25)

Mr Odendaal has the right and the means to evict the people out of his land because the government is on his side. That is why he refers to the indigenous owners of the land as trespassers and he, a settler becomes the owner of the land. Vera discloses the problem with her husband:

... if the administration does give the farmers the permission to declare township there, he'll be in a position to say to the people, pay up or get off. He'll zone such and such a number of plots, and that won't be enough for those who possibly can pay. .. I've seen farmers rent a piece of land half the size of this room for a hundred rands a month. Rural-rack rent, and we've no legal recourse. (27)

She reveals that apartheid regime is exploitative: "Exploitation is the other name for the law of supply and demand my darling" (27). The denigrating way of living forced many to go

on exile and when they came after the ban on apartheid many had no place to go.

The discovery of mineral deposits brought an influx of thousands of fortune hunters and mine owners into South Africa. Consequently the British administration introduced a pass law in 1872 - a law that demanded that local Khoikhoi and so - called free blacks must carry passes which indicated where they lived and for whom they worked. Athol Fugall in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* captures the effect of such a law to the blacks. Many like Sizwe Bansi changed their identity to Robert Zwelinzima in order to survive. Also in *None to Accompany Me*, characters carry along with them the pass in order to be permitted to get into certain areas of the town: "Didymus carried a pass" (29). Without a pass movement around town is impossible.

Laws like the population Registration Act of 1950 separated South Africa in to different races (whites, coloured or natives) and the group Area Act (N0. 41) of 1950 restricted each race to a specific geographical area. Mixed marriages between whites and non-whites were banned. In *A Question of Power*, Bessie Head represents this reality through her protagonist who is a product of a mixed relationship. She is despised and discriminated against in the society on the basis of her birth (colour)

In *Waiting for the Barbarians* J.M. Coetzee relates the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised. Through this novel he exemplifies the monstrosity of the colonial enterprise by indicting the colonial system. Through the character of the Magistrate and his perception in *Waiting for the Barbarians* we see the victimisation of the colonised. In the beginning of the text, through their imperial mission the whites assimilated the natives under the pretext of civilising

them. For example the Magistrate says that Colonel Joll's mission is to "find out the truth" (3). This statement is ambiguous and is an implied satire. It satirises Colonel Joll who is supposed to be an emissary of truth but oppresses the "Barbarians". Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* opines that:

...imperialism was a thing of mind and representation, as well as a matter of military and political power and extraction of profit...At the time of high imperialism in the late nineteenth Century, most British imperialist cherished an unambiguously heroic image of themselves as conquerors and civilizers of the world. Such self-projections were of course not unique to Europe. They were pretty much standard practice for any regime with territorial ambitions. (23)

The above citation posits that the colonial empire was that of pain and torture. The colonised were considered primitive, inferior, barbaric and even savage; as such the treatment of the barbarians by Colonel Joll, to him is justified.

Some of the Eurocentric notions of the imperialist are jaundiced and prejudiced just as the Barbarians have been created by the capricious imagination of Colonel Joll. The Magistrate is scandalised by the rumours of the barbarians on which the whole empire mission has been based. That is why he cautions Colonel Joll not to attack the 'barbarians' because the evidence he has about their location is built only on "hearsay" (12). Moreover these are nomads whose peacefulness is said to be "legendary" (15). This is the lie the colonial masters used to gain access into the indigenous

territories and occupy indigenous lands. Colonel Joll's search for the truth justifies the brutality and subjugation of the people.

Creative writers from various regions of the Commonwealth have represented this history of trauma and exploitation in several ways. It is an unforgettable history of treachery, reminiscent of slavery, a history of shame, pain, poverty, rootlessness and assimilation. Andre Brink notes that:

History provides one of the most fertile silences to be revisited by South African writers. Not because no voices have traversed it before but because the dormant discourse of white historiography as well as temptations to replace it by a new dominant discourse of black historiography has inevitably silenced for so long so many other possibilities.
(22)

The rape of the barbarian girl represents the rape of the colonies - physically and psychologically. The imperialists did not go to these lands to save the people nor because of any genuine concern for them. It was all for their own selfish ends. The Magistrate reveals: "Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe" (133). The Magistrate represents the conscious side of empire while the colonel represents the greedy and wicked colonial master, who plunders the territory without conscience. The Magistrate thus states:

Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. One thought alone preoccupies the

submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. By day it pursues its enemies. It is cunning and ruthless; it sends its bloodhounds everywhere. By night it feeds on images of disaster: the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation. A mad vision yet a virulent one: I, wading in the ooze, am no less infected with it than the faithful Colonel Joll as he tracks the enemies of Empire through the boundless desert, sword unsheathed to cut down barbarian after barbarian. ... (133)

From the above, it is revealed that despite the 'civilising mission' of empire, it is actually personal gain and interests that motivated Empire to the various colonies they colonised. Moreover, it is not the colonised who is barbaric per se but those who pursue the 'enemies of empire' in an abominable manner. The Magistrate towards the end of the text says:

For I was not, as I liked to think, the indulgent pleasure loving opposite of the cold rigid colonel. I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow. Two sides of imperial rule, no more no less. (135)

From the above we get to know the aim of empire. Empire is built on grounds of complete exploitation. For example the barbarian girl is sexually exploited. The barbarian girl represents the colony and coming to consciousness for the

Magistrate. He realises the import of the heinous nature of imperialism when he cries out:

I wanted to live outside history. I wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subject. I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them. How can I believe that, that is cause for shame? (154)

History is the ultimate judge and he understands this. His position in Empire, relationship and sexual abuse of the barbarian girl will judge him. The Magistrate is the historian of the present who wishes history exonerates him of his sexual exploitation of the barbarian girl.

The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, 1949, and Immorality Act, 1950 prohibited sexual intercourse and marriage between Whites and Blacks. This was intensified by the Population Registration Act, also in 1950, that classified Africans into three categories according to race : Black, Colored, or White. That is why in Bessie Head's *Maru*, Margaret Cadmore Junior's mother was placed in a mental institution for dating a black stable boy. Mary Turner's attachment to Moses the black servant in *The Grass is Singing* is also considered taboo on the existing laws. But these laws were more exacting between black men and white women because white men slept with black women. For example in J.M Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* the barbarian girl who is caught and brought to Colonel Joll is sexually tortured beyond comprehension. The boy says the barbarian girl is beaten, given painful and excruciating torture such that she goes blind; "she cannot walk. They broke her feet" (37).

Furthermore a “kind of fork with only two teeth” with little knobs is “put in the coals till it was hot then they touched you with it, to burn you” (41). Black men aided slave business. The blacks are used as guides. For example the Headman gives his daughter for sex to Price. Price sexually exploits this girl. He makes her perform indescribable oral sex:

And then my mouth, he took pleasure there but again he could not break into satisfaction and I found it as painful but even more shameful for I could not scream... He would use my mouth to quieten me and say that if he felt my teeth he would kill me. (45)

These gruesome acts should be perpetrated by the Africans who are said to be “primitive and barbaric” but they are committed by the “civilised” whites. The Magistrate desires that the Barbarians should protest because he believes that colonialism was improper. Thus he says: “I wish that these barbarians would rise up and teach us a lesson, so that we will learn to respect them” (51).

The Groups Areas Act, 1950, restricted the entrance of Blacks into the urban, industrial and agricultural areas, reserving these areas only for the Whites. This is evident and portrayed in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarian*. President F.W. de Klerk announced a formal end to the apartheid in 1990. The Colonel questions the Magistrate’s support and aid to the Africans. He says to him : “You seem to have a new ambition. You seem to want to make a name for yourself as the one just man, the man who is prepared to sacrifice his freedom to his principles” (114). His principles may be genuine but it

does not go with the acts and Bills passed in the nation. But his desire is that he:

wanted to live outside the history that empire imposes on its subject, even its lost subject. I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of empire laid upon them. How can I believe that that is cause of shame? (154)

Yvonne Vera's novel *Nehanda*, shows the strong emphasis on the supernatural and spiritual aspect that surrounded the lives of the Zimbabwe natives. Their ancestors were in control, an outlook that the colonizers did not share. Vera illustrates these contrasting cultural values in her narrative by stating, "We allow him to dig for gold, but the land is not his. The land cannot be owned. We cannot give him any land because the land does not belong to the living" (43). Such a way of thinking about land and of revering ancestral spirits existed in African history and it is important that it is shared with the modern world to preserve its historical existence.

Likewise, Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* is a historical novel that represents post-apartheid South Africa as much as the the Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of the 1850s. The Xhosa CattleKilling is a historical event that took place thus the text shows the link between history and literature. The story documents colonialism in the land, "wars, and settler incursion" in the amaXhosa land. The story goes that a young prophetess in April 1856 asked the amaXhosa to "slaughter their cattle and not cultivate their fields, in hope of restoring a paradise-like world of contentment and abundance (Offenburger 165). In the novel's Dedication, Mda informs us that the novel is replete with "intertextual and historical

references”. The novel also deals with binary opposed themes which Andrew Offenburger describes as “numerous dualisms - modernity/tradition, belief/ disbelief, city/country, /elders - to create a vibrant and complex postapartheid novel” (164). It represents the returned journey of Camagu from exile in the United States to South Africa after almost thirty years only to find himself overqualified and unemployed, a stranger in his own country (31). Offenburger writes that *The Heart of Redness* is the first novel to focus at length on the Xhosa CattleKilling; it is in fact part of a tradition of narratives that blur the boundaries between history and story” (165). He further states that

Ever since the event transpired in the mid-nineteenth century, writers, painters, poets, and playwrights have borrowed from the works of historians and vice versa to try to understand and represent how Nongqawuses prophecy could precipitate the implosion of the amaXhosa. Such experiments in narrative construction lend themselves especially well to postcolonial and postmodern authors, who apply intertextual voices and other authorial devices to inform historical events, as Mda phrases it. (165)

So, Coetzee’s, Fugard’s, Vera’s writings are counter, and counter -counter attack on their misrepresentations.

East Africa

In East Africa the Ngugis’ through the character of Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* divulge that imperialism is a means through which the British masters stole and ripped the people of their cultural values. The indigenous people become

landless, labourers, squatters in their land while the colonial masters exploited them by using them as labourers working under unsuitable conditions. The play chronicles the Kenyan people's struggles against foreign domination. In the introduction to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, the Ngugis' posit that the play is:

Not a reproduction of the farcical trial at Nyeri but rather an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement. (5)

Gakaara in *Mau Mau Authors in Detention* re-echoes this:

... Before the coming of the white man, our land was the land of joy and plenty, we had plenty of food and large heads of goats and cows, and our people were people of wealth and dignity and great warriors. And the white man did not usher in an era of peace. On the contrary, he introduces an era of perpetual war, war with ourselves as we struggle with desperate and hopeless poverty and deprivation. We have to come to grips with a realisation of this bitter truth: for until we change the situation our plight will remain one of sorrow and tears. (qtd in *Mau Mau Memoirs* 10)

Kimathi's Mau Mau oath of initiation is to "protect our soil, protect our people" (54). Leader in *I Will Marry When I Want* in the same vein declares:

...I swear by the oath of the masses and by the blood of the Kenyan people... I will never let this soil go with foreigners leaving the people of Kenya wretched! If I ever let it go, may this, the people's oath, destroy me and the blood of the masses turn against me. (68)

Furthermore, in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Johnie accuses Woman that of looking like "a Mau Mau, like one of Kimathi women... wanjiru... at Karunani Camp." The mention of the Karunani camp is a reference to a historical site in the history of Mau Mau because Mau Mau dissidents and activists were locked up in this place.

The Trial of Dedan Kimathi is an example of resistance against colonialism. At the beginning of the play, Kimathi is brutalised and forced to answer charges for a crime he does not commit – that of being in possession of a gun without a licence which according to the judge is contrary to the law and thus constitutes a criminal offence. Kimathi refuses to answer charges in a law court whose laws to him have done nothing to the Kenyan masses. He says:

I despised your laws and your courts: what have they done for our people: what? Protected the oppressor, licensed the murderers of the people: our people, whipped when they did not pick your tealeaves, your coffee beans. Imprisoned when they refused to "ayah" your babies...murdered when they didn't

nickshaw your babies and your gentlemen. I recognised only one law, one court: the courts and law of those who fight exploitation. (27)

The judge goes ahead to justify the inequality in the judicial system by saying that “no society can be without laws to protect property... I mean protect our lives... Civilisation...investment...Christianity...orders” (26). The colonialist government was based on the system of divide-and-rule government. In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* Woman highlights this divide-and-rule policy:

Our people tearing one another...all because of crumbs thrown at them by the exploiting foreigners. Our own food eaten and leftover thrown to us in our own land... we buy wood from our own forest, sweat on our own soil for the profit of our oppressor. (18)

Moreover the people have no say in the government and see no reason why they should be compelled to obey the white man’s laws. Kimathi refuses to plead guilty to such a law. Rather he scorns: “An imperialist court of law... plead: Death to a criminal judge in a criminal court, set up by criminals laws, the law of oppression. I will not plead guilty to a law in which we had no part in the making” (25). The judge authoritatively avers that “There is only one law, one justice” (25). Kimathi stubbornly points out to the judge “two laws, two justices” because “One law and one justice protect the man of property, the man of wealth, the foreign exploiter. Another law, another justice, silence the poor, the hungry; our people” (25-

26). This statement is like what Achebe writes in *Things Fall Apart*:

But apart from the church, the white man had also brought a government. They had built a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance. He had court messengers who brought men to him for trial. Many of these messengers came from Umuru on the bank of the Great River, where the white men first came many years before and where they had built the center of their religion and trade and government. (174)

This was the British method of control: force the natives to speak the British language and worship their God and follow British laws. The Ngugis' are able to represent the natives' feelings and perceptions of the Whiteman encroachment on their land. Dedan Kimathi is tortured by Henderson to yield to the colonial master. He strongly stands firm to his oath and:

For four hundred years the oppressors has exploited and tortured our people: for four hundred years we have risen and fought against oppression; against enslavement of body, mind and soul... Our people will never surrender. (58)

Moreover Kimathi states the reason of this resistance:

The Whiteman has converted us into his private property, uncircumcised as he is, he is a clever man and we must prove to him that we were circumcised to get rid of all fear. We will fight the Whiteman

until the last man is killed. There will be no rest until we expel all Europeans to their countries of origin. (qtd in *Mau Mau* 127)

It is obvious that the people are not happy with the Whiteman's physical and economic extortion.

Most African novels can be viewed as historical realities; recreating the past in a narrative form through an African's eyes. Thus, an African form of literature can prove to be a modern day answer to much of the conflicts that the Africans faced with the presence of white colonisers.

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that colonialism and history are thematic preoccupations in Commonwealth Literature. The history of Commonwealth nations is common because of a shared history of British imperialism. Some of these regions experience colonialism either directly or indirectly. And that is why writers from the Commonwealth deal with these thematic preoccupations. History is reconfigured in such a way to show the experience of the past and the double consciousness of the people. These themes have spurred the creative imagination of most Commonwealth writers.

While conceding that there are similarities, it is evident that there are differences between their approaches to history and colonialism. From our analysis so far, each society is unique in its historical experience. In the Caribbean, South Africa and East Africa, colonialism was by direct rule – the colonisers settled and took ownership of the land because of its fertile nature and favourable climatic condition while in West

Africa the colonisers used the policy of indirect rule. Consequently, themes like rootlessness, homelessness are not characteristic of the West African and Indian sub regions. The themes of slavery, colonialism and the period of nationalism are incorporated in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *Ti Jean and His Brothers* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, *Crossing the River*, and *Higher Ground* amongst others. This history is reconstructed through the use of dramatic techniques such as flashback, mime, symbolism, song and dance in the dramatic texts while narrative techniques are used for the prose texts. The quest for land, wealth and labour brought the imperialist to Africa. That is why we conclude that the British Empire was built on exploitation and self-centeredness. Slavery is part of African historiography particularly the transportation of slaves to the New World. Consequently, of this slavery some literary regions of the commonwealth like the West Indies reveal themes like homelessness, rootlessness and identity crisis. Each writer depicts the impact of colonialism and slavery on the sociocultural, economic, religious and political realities of their societies. Colonialism had negative consequences because many of the people suffered identity and cultural losses, otherness, exploitation and oppression institutionalized by slavery and racial segregation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Counter Discourse in Commonwealth Literature

Colonialism gave birth to colonial discourse. Elleke Boehmer informs us that Colonial discourse is a collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions, implied meanings which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion. It embraced a set of ideological approaches from expansion to foreign rule, sometimes called Orientalist or Africanist depending on the categories of representation involved. Colonialist discourse thus constituted the system of cognition, the interpretative screens which Europe used to found and guarantee its colonial authority (Boehmer 5). Homi K. Bhabha in “The Other Question” in *The Location of Culture*, highlights how the colonisers’ discourse construes the colonised population as degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. He maintains that:

Despite the play of power within colonial discourse and shifting positionalities of subjects, (for example effects of class, gender ideology, different social formations, varied systems of colonisation, and so on), I am referring to a form of governmentality that is marking out a “subject nation” appropriates, directs, and dominates its various spheres of activity. (70)

Bhabha further adds that this “play” in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power in colonial discourse produces the colonised as a social reality which is at once an

“other” and yet entirely knowable and visible. Edward Said in *Orientalism* confirms Bhabha’s view when he contends that:

The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (87)

The above quotation from Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, explicates the ideological representation the “West” gives itself. The relevance of this representation is to portray their culture as superior to that of the colonised.

This chapter emphasises how colonialist (mis) representations of the colonised people have provoked a new kind of writing among the Commonwealth writers termed counter discourse. Sarah Anyang Agbor in “Things Fall Apart: Rememorizing and Representation of War in Modern African Fiction” states that “So many people have misconceptions about indigenous peoples because of colonialists’ writings” which “presented a gloomy and falsified picture and representations of Africans and their supposed affinity to war in their various writings” (28). George M. Gulgelberger in ‘Marxism and African Literature: A survey of Developments’ asserts that ‘colonialist writings, is a fabricated / fictitious realism which inaccurately reflects or willfully manipulates reality’. He further quotes:

Imperialist fiction tends to be unconcerned with the truth-value of its representation. In fact, since such literature does not so much represent as present the

native for the first time, it mostly and overtly affirms the reader experience of his own culture. ([82] cited in Jan Mohamed:53)

The budding national literatures of Malaya, West Africa and the West Indies were particular to counter the representations of their culture and people. This representation can be seen in early colonial paradigmatic texts like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; and other texts like Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, and Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*. Counter discourse is one of the ways that the empire attempts to "Decenter the centre". Many commonwealth writers use literature to dismantle the white man's arrogated superiority.

Counter discourse is seen in the manner in which the empire writes back to the centre. The so-called "white man's burden" to civilize and bring light to the dark continent of Africa was a farce because it gave them legitimacy to their expansionist policies. King Leopold II of Belgium in a speech in 1888 clearly outlines this:

The mission which the agents of the state have to accomplish on the Congo is a noble one. They have to continue the development of civilization in the centre of the equatorial Africa, receiving their inspiration directly from Berlin and Brussels. Placed face to face with the primitive barbarism, grappling with sanguinary customs, that date back thousands of years, they are obliged to reduce this gradually. They must accustom the population to general laws of which the most salutary is assuredly of work. (qtd by Abanda 30).

King Leopold II further explains that such a mission was intended 'To open to civilization the only part of the globe where Christianity has not penetrated and to pierce the darkness which envelops the entire population' (in Kimbrough 80). Edward Garnett describes the expansionist tendency of *Heart of Darkness* in his review for *The Academy and Literature*, on the novel's essential meaning. He holds that the novel is:

An analysis of the white man's morale when loose from European restraint and planted down in the tropics as an "emissary of light" armed to the teeth to make trade profits out of subject races. They gulf between the white man's system and the black man's comprehension of its results – the unnerved, denigrating whites starving all day and every day at the heart of darkness which is alike, meaningless and threatening to their own creed and conception of life (qtd in Kimbrough 239).

As a counter discourse Commonwealth writers as well as Postcolonial writers respond to the "master" discourses of the European imperial power. Salman Rushdie puts it thus "The Empire Writes Back to the Centre" where "Empire" stands for the sum total of British colonies lost during independence, while the "Centre" refers to Britain. The empire writing back to the centre is in a bid to assert their identity and bring out their socio-economic and cultural realities experiences. The Commonwealth writers believe that external representations are often very wrong and dangerous. Besides preserving authentic Commonwealth cultures (particularly African, Indian, Caribbean cultures), the Commonwealth texts are able

to change people's traditional views of Africa and its native inhabitants. In doing this, African, Caribbean, Indian, literature could abolish all racial and ethnic stereotypes concerning Africans and Indians as primitive people. In fact, some European literature, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, ignores Africans as humans and depicts them as "a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly" (26). Such horrible depiction of Africans as savages would come from such a narrow European point of view. Also, if Commonwealth Literature was not present to depict the Commonwealth regions cultural differences, such a stereotypical view might remain, and thus be an excuse for European colonisation.

Colonial discourses were predominantly biased, Eurocentric pieces whose major aims were to justify the European colonialism as well as the demeaning treatment accorded the colonised by the colonisers. For example Daniel Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe* presents Friday as an inglorious cannibal, Jane Austen in *Jane Eyre* presents the Creole woman as mentally deranged and troublesome, E. M. Forster presents India in *A Passage to India* as a land of disease and dirt, while Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* projects Africa as a place of complete chaos. Colonial discourses are rife with such faulty, one sided and denigrating aspects about the colonised. Pieterse cites G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) description of the African in his lectures at Jena in 1830,

The Negro represents natural man in all his wild and untamed nature, if you want to treat and understand him rightly, you must abstract all elements of respect and morality and sensitivity - there is nothing remotely humanized in the Negro's character. (34)

Hegel further states that the African does not form a part of the historical world and shows neither movement nor development. Joyce Cary in *Mister Johnson* characterises Mister Johnson as an African stereotype. Though an adult he behaves like a child in the eyes of the Europeans. His relationship to Harry Rudbeck, the British colonial administrator, for whom he works, is very much that of a child to a parent. The representation betrays European ideological bias in which the European perspective is always maintained as primary. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Writers in Politics* observes that in 1738, the leading European philosopher David Hume assumed that:

...the Negro is naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion; nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers among them; no arts; no science. (9)

Colonialist discourse justified colonialism and their so called civilising mission by representing deprecating depiction about the African landscape, its people, their language, traditions, belief systems and cultures. In their literary works Africa is represented as hopelessly lost and unredeemable except, of course by Europe. In the *Edinburgh Review* (1979) it was succinctly articulated that: "Europe is the light of the world the ark of knowledge: upon the welfare of Europe hangs the destiny of the most remote Savage people" (qtd in Pieterse 34).

Many critics believe that Conrad paints a derogatory picture of Africans and Africa in his novel *Heart of Darkness* and thus he is biased in the presentation of Africans in *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe in his article entitled "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," emphasizes: "*Heart of*

Darkness projects the image of Africa as the other world; the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (cited in Kimbrough 252). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* opens on the River Thames he describes the river as "Unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the utmost ends of the earth" (18). Although the narrator says "For the Thames too had been one of the dark places of the earth...it conquered its darkness and is now at peace" (19). The River Congo, the setting of the plot is said to be "a mighty big river" that resembles:

... an immense snake uncoiled with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it ...it fascinated me as a snake would a bird – a silly little bird. The snake had charmed me. (22)

Conrad indirectly suggests that The Thames is the height of civilisation and beneficial to its inhabitants while The Congo is still primitive. Hence: "...going up that river (Congo) was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (28). Chinua Achebe in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* argues that Conrad sets up Africa as a foil to Europe, a place of negations in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (252). Africa is "the other world, the antithesis of Europe" (252). He believes that Conrad's comparisons of the Congo and the Thames, and the two women who loved Kurtz, one African,

and the other European is highly prejudiced. Achebe argues that art should liberate and not enslave. The African is not given any personality. Conrad refuses to name his African characters. The African characters in *Heart of Darkness* have no names. They are consistently referred to as niggers, fellows, cannibals, creatures, brutes, and savages. These “brutes had the hearts of wild men, which spelt out utter savagery” (20). They were an “inconceivable mystery” (60). They performed “unspeakable rites” and had “monstrous passions” (82). They are described as: “bundles of acute angles” (32); “black shapes” (31), “phantoms” (86), “black shadows of disease and starvation” (31), “moribund shapes” (31), “black figures” (46), “strings of dusty niggers” (32), “raw matter” (30), “mysterious niggers” (60). To highlight their “primitive state” Marlow says, “they were a great pleasure to look at” (28) and “They move about naked like ants” (29). He further says he was “horror-struck” when “one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees and went on all fours towards the river to drink” (32). Reacting against such appalling portrayal Achebe assesses critically that great art can only be: “...on the side of man’s deliverance and not his enslavement; for the brotherhood and unity of all mankind and not for the doctrines of Hitler’s master races or Conrad’s rudimentary souls” (qtd in Kimbrough 281). Concluding his attack on *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe describes it as:

A book which parades in the most vulgar fashion, prejudices and insults from which a selection of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question. It seems to me totally inconceivable

that great art or even good art could possibly reside in such unwholesome surrounding. (qtd in Kimbrough 281)

This kind of misrepresentation, they argue lead to the loss of dignity, self-pride and cultural identity. His novel has given birth to so many counter discourses where the colonised try to address the misconception expressed in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart* and Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* could be read as rewriting of colonial enterprise as well as asserting their own culture. In *Nehanda* Vera's creative imagination is influenced through Shona traditional myths, legends, folktales and history. Yvonne Vera decentres Western myth by projecting her rich Shona tradition, customs, religion and beliefs. She brings the Shona culture to the centre and thereby creates new centres

In this novel she creates a traditional African society before and during colonialism. She revalorizes the African culture, atmosphere, beliefs, customs and traditions by bringing them to the centre. Vera draws inspirations from African-Zimbabwean oral traditions such as storytelling motif, myths, and legends. One of the themes in counter discourse writing is resistance and revolt. Vera uses the revolt of the Shona people to resist British imperialism and exploitation. She mobilizes the people:

Spread yourselves through the forest and fight till the stranger decides to leave. Let us fight till the battle is decided. Is death not better than this submission? There is no future till we have regained our lands and our birth. There is only this moment, and we have to fight till we have redeemed ourselves. What is today's work on this

land if tomorrow we have to move to a new land?
(66)

Consequently she highlights African independence and identity. She abhors Western social and cultural norms and thus warns her people:

Do not submit to the unknown wisdom of strange tongues. Those who have submitted to the spirit of the stranger have brought an abomination to the land. Can we defeat an enemy whose god is already in our midst? Rise up I say. Rise up and fight (66).

John Yang tells us in his article “Resistance Figure Vs. the Colonial Oppressor” that:

Vera’s *Nehanda* is the typical resistance figure of post-colonial literature. Vera depicts Nehanda as a unique woman who is granted special powers to help her people fight the colonists’ oppression. (1).

Moreover he expatiates by stating that Nehanda represents the typical post-colonial resistance figure because her “special powers” are ordained from birth by the gods of the land and do not relate to any Western influence. Significantly “her visions originate purely from the indigenous culture and religion” (ibid). Vera builds up Nehanda as a special character free from any colonial influence (politically, socially and culturally).

In colonialist discourse the Africans are characterised as servants, housemaids or mistresses. They carry out menial jobs. For example Marlow describes them thus:

Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints and their limbs were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them rhythmically clinking. (30)

The colonialist tactfully alienated the natives from political and economic influence while at the same time their culture was gradually being eroded by settler values. The natives were assimilated, their African names which the colonial masters find hard to call were taken away from them and they were given new names that meant nothing to the people. In Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* the government official, Mr. Browning, changes his servant's name from Mashoko to Moses because he cannot make an effort to remember the name Mashoko. Vera writes:

Moses had once told Mr. Browning his heathen name, but Mr. Browning can see no point in using it. The new name is easier to remember, and more importantly, it is a step toward the goal of civilizing the country. Like the embryonic garden outside Mr. Browning's window, the name creates a space in which Mr. Browning can feel comfortable. Moses does not yet seem to understand much of what represents progress, but Mr. Browning is confident that his efforts will bear fruit. (44)

He considers Mashoko primitive and uncultured: “What a fool this Moses is, a real clown. He wonders what his wife will think of Moses. His habits are embarrassing” (46). Jamaica Kincaid in *A Small Place* confirms the assimilation agenda of the colonisers when she says everywhere the British went, “They turned it England, and everybody they met they turn English. But no place could ever really be England and nobody who did not look like exactly like them would ever be English” (24). Mashoko (Moses) debunks the Western view that Africans cannot think and are servile. “Mr. Browning renames his African servant, Moses because he considers Mashoko, his real name as heathen” (55). Interestingly, Mashoko thinks: “what a fool Mr. Browning is, Mashoko thinks” (45). Mashoko does not find his work interesting; in fact when he is in his village, he feels ashamed of it. If it were not for hut taxes that he is being made to pay, he would not accept the work. His cattle will be confiscated if he fails to pay the money asked of him (45). Putting on his traditional clothes he resigns from the services of Mr. Browning saying: “Yesterday I greeted you and stayed, but today, I part... I am proud of my people. I am going back to the wisdom of my people” (74). He refuses to be controlled and brainwashed thus asserting his own culture.

Phillips’ novel *Crossing the River* provides a fictional record of colonialism and resistance particularly through the narrative of Nash Williams. In *Crossing the River* Edward Williams wonders about Nash Williams’s situation in Africa. He believes Africa must be the heart of darkness as it is described. He is surprised of Nash’s description of Africa as a place of peace and love. He says “I doubt if I shall ever consent to return again to America. Liberia, the beautiful land of my forefathers is a place where persons of colour may enjoy

freedom” (18). Nash expresses his love for Liberia, Liberia which he celebrates as home.

It is the home for our race and a country in which industry and perseverance are required to make a man happy and wealthy. Its laws are founded upon justice and equality and here we may sit under the palm tree and enjoy the same privileges as our white brethren in America. Liberia is the star in the East for the free coloured man. It is truly our home. (18)

In as much as it is not as developed as America, he feels more at home in this country with all its inconvenience:

My glorious asylum in Liberia remains under the protection of a wise God, who promises to be a God of all nations, provided they obey and dutifully serve Him. Although a country with some inconveniences, there remain many privileges to be enjoyed, for any man can live here that will work...(26)

Liberia is described as a “glorious asylum”. Nash Williams deconstructs the stereotypes about Africa and positively exposes the beauty of Africa. When Nash gets to Liberia on his missionary assignment the origin of his grand parents, he found that in Liberia unlike America, there is no discrimination. In Liberia he achieves the whole essence of a human being because first, “...in this republic, the practice is to address me as Mr. Williams and not as boy” (32-3). He indicates the humiliation of the black man in Western world where a black

man is referred to as a boy to continue their rule over him. The interacting codes of race and class do not exist in Liberia. Moreover unlike the grim picture of a wild jungle which Africa is attributed to be, Williams finds a haven in Liberia. He tells Edward “Far from corrupting my soul, this Commonwealth of Liberia has provided me with the opportunity to open up my eyes” to the reality of the African land. There is an afrocentric awareness in this sentence. The “open up” of “his eyes” refers to the tearing away of the Eurocentric education of Africa given by his educators. It is in light of this, he further states that the experience in Liberia has “cast off the garb of ignorance which has encompassed me all to secure the whole course of my life” (61-2). This is the beginning of resistance to Western stereotypes and solidarity for Liberia.

Another form of counter discourse is what I term religious counter discourse. Some writers critique colonialism through the church (Christianity). Apart from imposing their cultures and beliefs on the indigenous people they impose their religion too. The church did not understand the Natives way of life such as their ritual ceremonies, traditional healing, and indigenous religion. J.R Miller Writes that The Oblates “aimed at eradicating all unchristian behaviour by means of strict rules [and] stern punishments” (J.R. Miller 91). Colonialism brought along its wake ethnocentrism. The colonisers believed that their culture was superior and of greater importance to the colonised own culture this religion brought about a lot of conflict in the various societies because it attempted to completely obliterate the colonised indigenous religion. In *Things Fall Apart* we see the repercussions on imposed religion on the people.

The British political and religious colonists brought conflict and chaos in Okonkwo’s world in Chinua Achebe’s novel

Things Fall Apart. It has been said that the white colonists came to Africa with the Bible in one hand and a gun in the other. Achebe writes in *Things Fall Apart*: “The church had come and led many astray. Not only had the low-born and the outcast but sometimes a worthy man joined it...” (174). Okonkwo, the proud, strong protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*, loses one of his sons, Nwoye, to the new religion and is enraged by this loss. He hates losing his son; he hates losing his culture. This rage builds in him and leads him to kill an African messenger working for the white court. Following the murder, Okonkwo takes his own life, an act that amuses the patronizing District Commissioner.

Kiss of the Fur Queen recounts how the local priest condemned the last medicine woman on the reserve as a witch (245-47 qtd. in Jerry, Wasserman 35). The Church had no understanding of traditional medicine and described it as primitive and forbade the natives from dancing their local dance (See Titley 171). Jerry Wasserman elucidates that in *Dry Lips*, “the powwow dancing bustle carried by activist Simon Starblanket symbolizes the indigenous religion and culture he hopes to bring back to the Wasaychigan Hill First Nation” (35-36). Tomson Highway in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* reasserts the Indian way of life through making his character Simon. Simon insists that in order to restore “the drum ... the medicine, the power” to the reserve, “We’ve got to learn to dance again” (43). Wasserman illuminates that:

Simon’s project to revitalize Native tradition includes marrying Patsy Pegahmagahbow, stepdaughter of the reserve’s last traditional medicine woman, Rosie Kakapetum. Pregnant with their baby, Patsy embodies the promise of Native

cultural rebirth. Simon's antagonist, Spooky Lacroix, is a born-again Catholic whose faith appears to have saved him from his terrible alcoholism; but the priests have also taught Spooky and his sister Black Lady Halked to despise everything connected to the old Native religion, including their late father, medicine man Nicotine Lacroix. (36)

To Spooky, the indigenous way is the binary opposite of Heaven. Thus the indigenous norms and culture are equivalent to hell/ devil. That is why when Simon suggests that Spooky's pregnant wife use Rosie as a midwife, Spooky retorts, "Rosie Kakapetum works for the devil" (91(See also Wasserman 36)). The clash of cultures through religion is seen in the juxtaposition of these two characters, Simon the protagonist and Spooky his antagonist. The symbol of indigenous religion is the bustle which Simon holds while Spooky's crucifix symbolizes the church. Wasserman comments that Act One of *Dry Lips* ends with a remarkable tableau that finds Dickie Bird "collapsed on the floor between Simon, who is holding aloft his bustle, and Spooky, who is holding aloft his crucifix" (78). Dickie Bird Halked, tormented teenage son of Black Lady is highly affected by this clash of religion. His characterization is symbolic of how the so called civilizing mission of the colonial power bereft the colonised identity and placed him in a position of silence. It is only once that he speaks in the play when he breaks into "a grotesque fractured version of a Cree chant" (75), Wasserman stresses that Dickie Bird "... silence is symptomatic of the trauma suffered by his community. Halked, stands in for Highway and his muteness for that which was unspeakable for the playwright himself" (36). Dickie Bird

“exemplifies the terrible human cost of the Church’s legacy to Native peoples” (36). Simon in an argument with Spooky berates:

Why can’t you and that thing ... (*pointing at the bible*) and all it stands for cure your nephew’s madness, as you call it, Spooky Lacroix? What has this thing ... (*the bible again*) done to cure the madness of this community and communities like it clean across this country, Spooky Lacroix? Why didn’t ‘the Lord,’ as you call him, come to your sister’s rescue at that bar seventeen years ago, huh, Spooky Lacroix? (90-91)

Simon refers to the scene seventeen years ago where Black Lady Halked gives birth to Dickie while dead drunk on the dance floor of a bar with the jukebox blaring and Big Joey watching. The civilising mission brought immorality as suggested by the “Jukebox” music and alcohol. The first time we see her in the play she is drinking a beer and reciting the rosary while Spooky preaches salvation and the apocalypse to Dickie Bird who “*is on his knees, praying fervently to this surrealistic, miraculous vision of ‘the Madonna’*” (52). Wasserman reiterates “The mock-Catholic iconography frames a scene of tragicomic displacement. Neither rosary, preaching, nor prayer adequately addresses what Dickie Bird requires for salvation” (36).

George Ryga’s *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* and Herschel Hardin’s *Esker Mike and His Wife, Agiluk*, exemplify relations between Aboriginal cultures and the Church. The Church is represented in both plays through the image of a priest who is “the representative of the institutions that attempt to restrict or

control Aboriginal peoples under the guise of helping them” (Jerry Wasserman 2). In resisting the imperial institutions playwrights and their new companies:

... refocused on the traditional spirituality the churches had suppressed and supplanted. De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre “was created partly to showcase Native legends,” according to Ojibway playwright Drew Hayden Taylor (1997, 145), and Toronto’s Native Earth Performing Arts rededicated itself to “traditional Native mythology” when Tomson Highway became artistic director in 1986 (Preston 1992, 140). Both companies had a hand in Highway’s groundbreaking play *The Rez Sisters*, first produced in 1986; the play features the trickster Nanabush, whom Highway calls “as pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology” (1988, xii). In 1988, Native Earth also produced Delaware playwright Daniel David Moses’s *Coyote City* (1990), one of whose Native characters is a sadly ineffectual born-again Christian clergyman. (Wasserman 24-25)

Commonwealth writers attempt to represent the socio-cultural, economic, political, historical and psychological realities of their societies. The elusiveness of Dulcie points to the problems of representation. Jenny Sharpe in her essay entitled “Figures of Colonial Resistance” sums up by saying that “The success” of our critical work depends on the recognition that the subaltern is irreducible and yet ultimately irretrievable. Our models remain inadequate” (Ashcroft 102). The subaltern is

irreducible because he is also dynamic through his culture. The point is how does one begin to write about a people one seems not to understand or articulate? Nash Williams in *Crossing the River* get to Liberia and discovers a new culture that kind of questions his missionary work. He reveals:

This missionary work, this process of persuasion is futile amongst these people for they never truly pray to the Christian God, they merely pray to their own gods in Christian guise for the American God does not even resemble them in that most fundamental of features. (62)

The indigenous culture and beliefs of the people are new to him and stronger such that he is not sure that Christianity can make a home in Liberia. He expresses his fear to Edward Williams: “The truth is our religion in its purest and least diluted form can never take root in this country. Its young shoots will wither and die; leaving the sensible man with the conclusive evidence that he must reap what grows naturally” (62). Martha in *Crossing the River* questions the existence of God. She does not think that a Good God will allow untold sufferings on innocent people. Her anger against God is evident in the passage below:

Martha sometimes heard voices. Perhaps there was a God. Perhaps not. Voices from the past ... The young evangelist preached with all his might, but Martha could find no solace in religion, and was unable to sympathize with the sufferings of the son of God when set against her own private. She stared at the Kansas sky. The shield of the moon shone

brightly. Still she heard voices. Never again would Hoffmans' mention their God to Martha. (79)

The Hoffmans' who talk about God are the very ones who sold her to slavery. What kind of a God do they worship, - a God who allows his subjects to sell others? It is the conflict of the Hoffmans' actions against their words. She gains consciousness of their hypocrisy and determines that: "(Never.) Never again would she stand on the auction block... Never again would she be renamed..." (80). The indictment is that the imperial masters use Christianity as a masquerade of their real intentions and as a means to break the resistance of the colonized and the slaves. And the most humiliating thing is that they capture slaves and change their names and impose different names on them.

Likewise in *Nervous Conditions*, just as the Kiguunda's are forced to do a church wedding, Babamukuru imposes church marriage on Tambu's parents. Tambudzai articulates:

Babamukuru did not know I suffered over the question of that wedding. He did not know how my mind had raced and spun and ended up splitting into two connected entities that had long, frightening arguments with each other, vocally, there in my head, about what ought to be done, the one half maniacally insisting on going, the other half equally maniacally refusing to consider it. (167)

She is in conflicting emotions because she does not think that it is the Christian marriage that should be considered as legal and

accepted. She perceives it as oppressive hence in protest she decides not to attend the marriage.

It must be mentioned that African Literature demonstrates the importance of change in a society, without shying away from tradition. In modern day Africa such tradition and contemporary culture do in fact mix into a hybrid way of life. For example, presently Africans will go to a Christian Church, which was brought and built by colonizers. However, these same Africans will go home to respect and pray to their ancestors traditionally. In fact, Chinua Achebe described his life as “at the crossroads of cultures.” Remembering his childhood he stated, “On one arm of the cross, we sang and read the Bible night and day. On the other, my father’s brother and his family offered food to idols” (*Morning Yet on Creation Day* 68). Many Commonwealth writers use their creative writings as vehicle to represent history, clash of cultures and values as well as identity and cultural assertion.

Vera in *Nehanda* demonstrates the understanding that can come between two opposing religious individuals if they respect one another as opposed to the master/servant relationships between races. This is evident in the scene where the priest tries to convert Kaguvi, one of the leaders of the Chimurenga, to Christianity. Kaguvi, an embodiment of African culture, finds it difficult to believe that God exist in the Bible. In total amazement he says to the priest that his is a “strange god who is inside your book, but he is also in many books” (105). Kaguvi tells him about his own god:

My god lives up above. He is a pool of water in the sky. My god is a rain-giver. I approach my god through my ancestors and ‘mudzimu’. I brew beer

for my god to praise him and I dance. My 'mudzimu' is always with me and I pay tribute to my protective spirit. (105)

The priest tries to find a point of convergence between the two cultures. He tells Kaguvi that his god is also in the sky and that "my God is the true God. He is the way to eternal happiness" (105). Kaguvi finds this difficult to swallow. And through him, Vera counters the Christian discourse through Kaguvi's questions. How can happiness be eternal? For Kaguvi: "If a man harvests his crops, that is happiness. If a man marries and has children, that is happiness. If a man talks to his neighbours and they respect him, that too is happiness" (105). The Priest also tells him: "In heaven we shall find happiness. More happiness than all the earth. In heaven we shall not labour, we shall sing and rejoice" (105). Kaguvi wonders:

We shall not labour? Kaguvi asks again, baffled. He does not know why a man would long for that kind of happiness. Work is not suffering, even though the priest insists that work has come to the world as a punishment on one man. What kind of god is this that will not be appeased with beer poured onto the ground? It is not punishment for a man to do all he can for a good harvest. For a man not to labour is laziness. 'Shall we go to heaven to be lazy? To sit behind our huts and bask in the sun like lizards' he asks suspiciously. (105)

Vera in this scene counters the idea of universalism and homogeneity in cultures. What may be revered in one culture may appear bizarre in another and a taboo in yet another

culture. Responding to the priest's idea that "we shall be kings in Heaven, all of us shall have an equal share of happiness" (106), Kaguvi counters: "This would be a chaotic world indeed". The priest tells him "Your god is an evil god". "I am here to save you from the eternal flames" (107). Kaguvi is shocked by the priest's condescending stance. However he agrees that "there is life after death" (107), and this life is "life as a spirit, to help protect those who are living" (107), as against the priest's own notion of after life in which men will rise from their graves in their former bodies (107). What this conversation reveals that each one of us is "ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are" (Stuart Hall *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 227). In the same vein Charles Larson's emphasises that "for better or for worse, each of us belongs to an ethnographically-sealed world" (in *The Post- Colonial Studies Reader* 65).

The chapter has investigated the way Commonwealth writers have countered some of the misrepresentations of their culture, history and religion. They counteract the derogatory picture of Africans and Africa in their novels through asserting their own cultures as well as rewriting their stories. Thus their texts could be read as a new history against the misconception expressed in many colonialist writings like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

From these examples we recognize that colonial discourse to a larger extent was a misrepresentation of the colonised. Consequently, these literatures create a source of dissent as Commonwealth writers started writing back to the Empire. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a counter discourse to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* is a rewriting of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. In *Foe* Defoe's Friday is given a voice to tell his story while Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso*

Sea is a rewriting of Jane Austen's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys offers Austen's Creole woman the opportunity to tell her own version of the story in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Vera's Nehanda asserts the African concept of religion and cosmology as opposed to that of the West to show that each person is ethnically located and that culture is dynamic. Yvonne Vera in *Nehanda* dismantles Western superiority and consequently uses literature to dismantle the myth of superiority of the white race over the black race. Such counter discourses addressed issues of bias with the aim of correcting them. The views presented contrasts sharply from the original colonial texts.

CHAPTER SIX

The Dialectics of Nationhood in Commonwealth Literature

From a purely political perspective, the term ‘the Commonwealth of Nations’ gives the false impression of the possible existence of some ‘natural’ entities called nations which happen to belong to an organisation called ‘The Commonwealth of Nations’. This impression, unfortunately is not ‘contained’ within the political realm where it might have found expression in such ramifications as ‘nation-state’, ‘national identity’, citizenship’, etc; it has overspilled into the literary sphere such that when the term ‘Commonwealth Literature’ is used from the perspective of the Commonwealth of Nations, it tends to suggest literature from pre-existing nations; that is nations as natural entities. Yet the ‘nationness’ of Commonwealth nations itself is an ongoing debate. If there is anything common in or about the Commonwealth, it is definitely not the ‘nations’. It is perhaps the history of those forged entities whose identity and sheer existence today cannot be accounted for by anything beyond their collective colonial experience. If pre-colonial (and later colonised) societies existed as more or less free, autonomous ‘nations’ – that is nations in the most basic definition of the word – then their forced marriage at the dawn of colonialism is arguably the genesis of what is known today as ‘Commonwealth Nations’.

The now hackneyed, almost clichéd assertion that Commonwealth Literature is literature from former British colonies seems to shroud the focus of that literature; of Commonwealth writers on the process of nations-building. In

other words, Commonwealth nations are not nations per se but rather entities in the process of becoming nations; those nations whose foundations were forcibly laid down by the excesses of colonialism and whose construction and survival depends on the will and determination of post-colonial nation-builders. Postcolonial theory will be used in our analysis. Some of the major figures in postcolonial theory and writing include: Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft, Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Peter Abrahams, Ayi Kwei Armah, Homi Bhabha, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Buchi Emecheta, Gareth Griffith, Salman Rushdie, Jamaica Kincaid and a host of others. Bill Ashcroft et al state that postcolonial theory:

Involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourse of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, linguistics and the fundamental experience of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. (2)

The birth and construction of postcolonial nations according to William Tordoff, was possible thanks to the nationalists who were able to “submerge subnationalism [loyalty to a tribe or region] within a wider nationalism” (47). He goes further to state that although popular loyalties (popular nationalist sentiments) tended to gravitate towards the traditional unit—anti-colonial nationalism was able to render loyalty to a subnational unit secondary to the countrywide unit (47). This pseudo renunciation of tribal loyalties and espousal of the

country-wide identity was equally a tacit acceptance of the new nation. The task of colonial and postcolonial authorities alike then has been the consolidation of the new nation. The dominance of the national identity over individual tribal and/or ethnic identities and loyalties presupposes the existence of a nation. In other words, tribe, ethnicity and other such shades of identification become secondary or altogether irrelevant.

As Frantz Fanon rightly argues:

Nationalism in the third-world is precisely what makes it possible to break out of a mythical ethnic purity and reach instead for a national identity. This national identity joins universal humanity by virtue of its worldly and datable particularity [...] the nation denotes a desire, one whose predication and consequence is a realignment of selves and the superseding of tribe. If, in the discourses of traditionalists and colonialists alike, the tribe is frozen as a supra-historical identity, this lie ideally fractures under the pressure of decolonization and nationhood. The fracturing becomes, through the intensity of its agony and danger, the narrative of the nation in secular history. And that narrative, according to Fanon, is as well the phenomenological, cultural, and political content of the nation in its unpredictable spasms of emergence. (qtd in Olakunle George 346)

Arguably therefore, the nationness of Commonwealth nations can only be measured by how irrelevant tribe, race, ethnicity have become in defining national identity; not just the *fact* of belonging to a nation, but more importantly the *feeling* of it. To

some extent, nationhood is the defeat of what Fanon refers to as “mythical ethnic purity”. The absence of nationhood precludes the existence of the nation because nationhood predefines a nation.

Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd on the other hand define a nation as:

A group of people, who believe themselves to constitute a nation, have things in common with each other and share a sense of nationhood. The nation can be defined as an imaginary community where people believe themselves to have some sort of link, or commitment to others in the nation, most of whom they will never meet. (48)

This link and commitment that defines a nation is shaped by the common historical and cultural heritage (colonial). Such is the only perspective from which Commonwealth nations can be defined. This however is just a definition which does not in and of itself presuppose the ‘reality’ of these nations because much of what is referred to as Commonwealth literature is more or less a critique of post-independence nations or the failure of these.

In the light of post-independence and from a purely literary perspective, how do Commonwealth writers perceive the *nation* in Commonwealth territories? This chapter is based on the basic assumption that although nationhood may not as yet be a reality in post-independence ‘nations’, Commonwealth literary discourse is pitched against the backdrop of nation-building. The analysis is done from the perspective of postcolonial theory.

Commonwealth writers are much concerned with the post-independence phenomenon of the reconstruction of post-independence nations which seems to run contrary to the ideal that independence promised. There seems to have developed a new elite class with a proprietary air that now dictates the terms of belonging to the post-independence *pseudo-nation* (nation in outlook and not in essence) such that nationhood has become an assertive political ruse which is the property of them that are not just part of the new 'nation' but the only ones who believe in its existence at all.

If a nation, like ethnicity, is a socio-political construct, that is a consequence of collective experience and/or memory, then the post-independence nation as portrayed in the works of post-independence Commonwealth writers is the exception that confirms the rule. To these writers, nationhood, or the sense of it preceded independence. That is to say the collective experience of the harsh realities of colonialism literarily inspired in the people a sense of togetherness and oneness that left the impression of a nation resisting colonial siege. The energy, the enthusiasm and the sense of duty and belonging that the *nationalists* awakened in the masses; their sense of commitment not just to the cause of independence but equally to the ultimate end of that independence, which was the retrieval as it were of the sense of belonging that colonialism had denied them; the hope that was roused by the huge promise of what independence would mean – the promise of big and beautiful things (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*)– all these came and went with the struggle and attainment of independence. The dreams have been deferred. Independence comes and the people realise that the common historical experience will not after all spell the birth of a 'national identity.'

The relevance of historical/cultural heritage in the conceptual definition of a nation as well as the importance of identity and belonging in nationhood makes the assertion of a national identity more or less synonymous to the assertion of an ethnic identity. In other words, the concept of national identity and nationness has become almost as enigmatic as to be merged into the broader concept of ethnicity which is also a construct. As John Hope Franklin argues, ethnicity:

[...] refers to an affiliation of people who share similar cultural characteristics. Members of ethnic groups share common languages, religious beliefs, cultural traditions and customs, value systems and nominative orientations. They also share a similar worldview, an ethnic consciousness—a peoplehood. Ethnicity is a socio-political construct that emerges from collective experiences in society... (“Ethnicity in American Life: The Historical Perspective” *Sources: Notable Essays on Race and Ethnicity* 24)

Arguably the sense of peoplehood beyond tribe and ethnicity was born in commonwealth nations by the collective experience of colonialism and it is that sense of peoplehood that bonded them against the colonial regime in the first place. Naipaul recaptures this sense of poeplehood earlier in his novel, *A Bend in the River* in the following account of Zabeth’s encounter with Ferdinand’s father:

As a trader he had travelled about the country during the miraculous peace of the colonial time, when men could, if they wished, pay little attention to tribal boundaries ... at independence tribal

boundaries had become important again, and travel was not as safe as it had been. The man from the south had gone back to his tribal land, taking the son he had had by Zabeth. (34-5)

During the colonial era, tribal boundaries disappeared because there was a greater boundary in place. The sense of nationhood (without a state of course) was fostered by the common colonial experience, which experience surpassed the petty tribal and ethnic differences. It is on the foundation of this experience that the new nations ought to have been built. In a typical post-independence-leader style, we see the Big Man in the novel pretending to consolidate the new 'nation' by posing as the Asante golden stool of the Congolese peoples – the soul of the nation. In his "chief's leopard-skin cap, short-sleeved jacket and polka-dotted cravat" the president seeks to convince the world that he is a man of the people. His idea of nation-building is the creation of the New Domain whose "shoddy grandeur" is a mockery of post-independence nationhood. It is the very impediment of nationhood because it creates a new kind of postcolonial colonial relationship between the new 'Self' and the new 'Other', namely the Big Man and his cronies on the one hand and the masses on the other. It is a replica of the Residential Area in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* which is anything but a consequence of the collective colonial experience. The New Domain and the Residential Area thus stand out as major landmarks of the failure of the post-independence nation in Ghana and the Congo.

The New Domain is a different world altogether; a world far removed from the horrendous conditions of the post-

independence pseudo nation. Salim notes this contrast in the following words:

To travel those few miles between the town and the Domain was always to make some adjustment, to assume a new attitude, and each time almost to see another country. [...] I was aware in the Domain that I belonged to the other world. (47)

That other world to which Salim refers is referential to the otherness that plagues the post-independence nation. The vainglory and the shoddiness of this extravagant investment is symbolic of the imminent disintegration of the otherness and the reconstruction of the Nation.

In *The Death Certificate* Alobwed'Epie narrates the story of nationhood and how ethnic complexes influence social and/or economic and political experiences as well as identity. People are segregated on the basis of their ethnicity. An ethnic group as "any social, religious, national-origin, language or regional category of subculturally distinct periods regardless of size, power or generational status" (Irving Lewis Allen 39). Beyond this definition, an ethnic group is either a minority group or a politically and/or economically weak group; a low-status group, which considerations Allen overlooks in his definition. The Francophone find themselves 'ethnically' superior to the Anglophones because of their position of power and as a result must be in at the top of government hierarchy. This ethnic superiority and power is seen in the various angles of economic and social institutions. Alobwed'Epie in his novel reveals that Political and economic inequalities between Anglophone and Francophone Ewawians have given the latter superiority complex over the former. Significantly, Ethnic' in

this case carries the etymological meaning of ‘substandard’ ‘other’ and ‘heathen’. Werner Sollars, in “Who is Ethnic” Sollars notes that the term ‘ethnicity’ has always denoted negativity, otherness. Etymologically, the Greek word from which the English ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’ are derived meant ‘gentile’ or ‘heathen’. Going back to ‘ethnos’, the word was used to refer not just to people but also to ‘others’...Thus the word retained its quality of defining another people contrastively and often negatively (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader* 220). The Anglophones are subordinated in the *The Death Certificate*. The citizens of the ‘First and second Province’ regard themselves as some sort of ‘superior brand or class’ of Cameroonian who should get all the favours and privileges while the “Others” pine and whine in hardship” (48).

On a national level segregation is seen in the Anglophone/Francophone dichotomy, where the Anglophone sees the Francophone as an oppressor and the Francophone views the Anglophone “the other”. ‘Anglophone’ or ‘Anglo’ does not refer to merely a linguistic entity or identity. It is an offensive trope for a group of people who are “Other”, ‘ethnic’. Meanwhile some Anglophones reiterate by calling Francophones “frogs” as a counter to “anglo”. From the above we can argue that ethnicity does not promote a feeling of belonging and this feeling of belonging (nationhood) is constructed by the society and sanctioned by the institutions in place. post independence belonging cannot be achieved because of ‘ethnic difference’.

Post-independence writers do not however focus solely on the failure of the post-independence nation. Nation-building is equally part of their major concerns. Towards the end of the novel – *A Bend in the River* – there are echoes of an impending war to topple the regime in place; that regime that has

destroyed the promise of the nationhood that independence held. It is a war that may lead to the death of the pseudo nation, but it will be a death from which new life, a new and worthwhile nation will hopefully be born. A similar disintegration befalls the post-independence Ghanaian nation where the Residential Area that not long ago was the symbol of all the “big and beautiful things” that independence promise, soon becomes a nightmare for the nation-wreckers. Although the regime that is being born out of this chaos does not seem to hold anything new or different from its predecessors, Armah is not all pessimistic as to the certainty of the birth of a Ghanaian nation. A day may come in the future when the beautiful ones might be born, a day when the people in the town at a bend in the river might live in less fear of a Big Man and see themselves as *part* of a big thriving nation; a day when Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians might live as one people with a common history and a common destiny; a destiny far removed from the tragic experiences of young Anglophone Cameroonians that John Nkemngong Nkengasong revisits in his poignant novel, *Across the Mongolo*, but until that day comes, nationhood will remain nothing but a beautiful dream. Armah points it out in that half hopeful, half pessimistic statement that only conveys to us his own long bewilderment that:

Someday in the long future, a new life would maybe flower in the country, but when it came it would not choose as its instruments the same people who had made a habit of killing new flowers. The future goodness may come eventually but before then where were the things in the present which would prepare the way for it. (160)

In Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, that future is already being prepared with the call to action coming from the Youth Guard who have been disbanded by the Big Man because they no longer served any important purpose in his oppression of the people. The disbanded and humiliated Youth Guard again re-enact the call for a sense of nationhood as in the days of the struggles for independence; people, they say, should bury their differences and join the struggles for the liberation, freedom from "the powers of imperialism, the multinationals and the puppet powers that be, the false gods..." (211-2). Like nation builders who want to create a country, a nation free for all who live in it, they assert that "We only know the truth, and we acknowledge this land as the land of the people whose ancestors now shriek over it. Our people must understand the struggle. They must learn to die with us (212).

This call is from the understanding that in their individual/separate tribal/ethnic affiliations, they cannot defeat the neo-colonial powers in place; those powers that have sought new ways of oppression. Like the masses in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, they have to forge a new peoplehood by burying their petty tribal and/or ethnic differences. The assertion of a Congolese, Ghanaian or Kenyan identity, the appropriation as it were, of the nation, is the first step towards nation-building, a step that despite all the setbacks has been one of many towards nationhood.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Language in Commonwealth Literature

Language constitutes another important area where Commonwealth literature dissents. Language is a system of sounds, word patterns used by human beings to communicate thoughts, feelings, desires and experiences. Edward W. Said in *Orientalism* explains that:

It hardly needs to be demonstrated again that language itself is a highly organized and encoded system, which employs many devices to express, indicate, exchange messages and information, represent and so forth. In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence but a re-presence, or a representation (“Introduction” 21).

Thus, language is the essence of man because it is the instrument through which man expresses himself/herself in dialogue. According to Bill Ashcroft et al in *The Post colonial Studies Reader*, “if one’s language or one’s immediate perceptions of the world do not concur then they must be suppressed in favour of that which the language itself reveals to be obvious” (55). This is just one position in the language debate. Okechukwu Umeh holds that: “Language is a medium of poetic utterance, the vehicle with which the poet transmits his message. The effectiveness of this utterance, of this message depends largely on the nature and quality of language used” (288). Thus language is a fundamental aspect of literary discourse. In this light, Lewis Nkosi holds that “a writer’s

special commitment is to language and its renewal” (46). Language is the medium of literary creativity, a vehicle through which artists transmit their messages. Language therefore is an instrument in the hands of the artist and how well he or she uses this instrument to achieve his purpose will depend on his capabilities as an artist and his overall motif.

Language occupies a central place in Commonwealth studies in particular and post colonial literature in general. This is because during the colonial encounter, the colonisers imposed their language on the colonised people. Rajeev S. Patke in “Nationalism, Diaspora, Exile: Poetry in English from Malaysia” states:

A quick, comparative glance at the time span separating colonialism and the beginning of a tradition of local writing in English in other regions such as the Indian sub-continent or the Caribbean, or parts of Africa, suggests that the situation in the peninsula was atypical. The critical-historical writing from Malaysia and Singapore has little to offer by way of hypothesis or explanation. In the absence of debate or evidence, it might be worth speculating that through the last decades of the colonial period, the minorities who were acculturated to the colonizer’s language and its literary legacy experienced a deeply schizoid relation to English as a language for creative expression. (76)

Consequently, conflicts have formed dealing with the question of which dialect can best communicate the modern African voice toward their daunting past and to express hope toward

their future. From these conflicts, several questions must be addressed. If a work of Modern African Literature is composed in English, should it be considered as belonging to English Literature as a whole? If so, must this work be evaluated and criticized by the same standards as other works of English Literature? While some critics are of the opinion that there should be a return to native languages (Ngugi wa Thiong'O), others believe that the colonial language (English in the case) provides common grounds (Chinua Achebe).

The theoretical and practical debate continues in *The Empire Writes Back: Theories and Practices in Post-Colonial Literature*. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explore the ways in which writers encounter the dominant colonial language. These critics used the terms 'abrogation' and 'appropriation'. By 'appropriation', they refer to "the process by which the language is made to bear the burden of one's own cultural experience... Language is adopted as a tool and utilized to express widely differing cultural experiences" (38-39). Among some of those who share this view is Nigeria's Chinua Achebe and the Indian-born British writer Salman Rushdie, who although he tackles the history of India, Pakistan and Great Britain, he considers writing in the new Englishes as a therapeutic act of resistance. Toyin Falola also adds that "English has been Africanised by way of innovation, experimentations, code switching, departures in themes and styles, the impact of culture, and the numerous limitations and challenges of bilingualism" (229). These writers want the use of the colonial language to reflect the postcolonial experience. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie explains that "far from being something that can simply be ignored or disposed of, the English language is a place where writers can and must work out the problems that confront emerging independent colonies"

(17). Like Rushdie, Chinua Achebe has adopted the colonial language but has given it a local coloration in order that it could appropriately transmit the experiences and worldview of his native Igbo community.

Colonialism has raped the country of its natural resources and of its culture and now the people are left with nothing but the colonial language itself to complain or protest against the ills of colonial rule. Talking about the British in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Elleke Boehmer says:

As well known, the Victorians had a genius for fashioning moral ideals which matched their economic need. They stapled duty on to interest, Christianity on profit. Enterprise it was believed, would secure the happiness, prosperity and salvation of dark tribes sunk in barbarism. (36)

Even in giving European education to Indians in 1835, Macaulay thought, it would be a sign of encouraging civilised behaviour but more especially it made trading easier among former “savages” (ibid, 36). So, contrary to the humanitarian reasons that they advanced for the educational schemes in India, the real motive behind the endeavour was the economic one. The civilising mission also had ulterior motives that were not always explained as such. Elleke Boehmer quotes the British liberal J. A Hudson as saying:

The main aim behind colonial expansion is financial interest; even where these were generated by groups with mixed motives, such as politicians philanthropists, the motor power of imperialism may have been provided by section interests, but its

“governor” was the struggle for profitable markets.
(37)

A writer appropriates the English language with influences from his indigenous language. Vinay Dharwadker reinforces that:

The general relation between a literature and its language is identical to the specific relation between a given utterance (or text) and the particular verbal medium in which it is articulated. This relation makes the existence of the language a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for the existence of the literature, and consequently embeds the history of the writing in the history of the medium of its composition. (95)

So the relationship between the language and the literary text places the latter in the context of the history of that language. The history of the language cannot be separated from that of the literary text. Hence the Commonwealth experience and its contact with the imperial center on the one hand and the English language on the other are intrinsically related. This is one of the several reasons we make talk of a Commonwealth Literature. However, apart from language there are other factors that define a literature such as norms, values and the dominant ideology(themes, realities) that exist in that literature. This results in a different language neither the “standard” of imperial British nor his indigenous language. Falola affirms that “Time and time again, the ‘nativization’ of English is now made clear in many African literary texts” (229). Eva Johnson from the northern Territory of Australia uses a range of

different kinds of English in her poetry. In “A Letter to My Mother”, she writes:

I not see you long time now, I not see you long time
now
White fulla bin take me from you, I don't know
why
Give me to Missionary to be God's child. (*Inside
Black Australia* 24-25)

The history of slavery is reenacted. This poet was taken from her mother when she was three. So she appropriates the language to narrate her ordeal as well as despondency.

Many of the writers use the English language because it gives them a wider audience and makes their work international. In this vein Rajeev S. Patke states that:

...They took to English – or were taken by it, which comes to pretty much the same thing – simply because they had little choice: English was at hand, it had a long and wide tradition that gave scope for creativity, and it gave access to the widest (and most rewarding) opportunities, careers and audiences. (77)

The political agenda for many writers is therefore to appropriate the dominant language and use it for their own purposes, while still retaining an indigenous discourse. Like Rushdie, Chinua Achebe has adopted the colonial language but has given it a local coloration in order that it could appropriately transmit the experiences and worldview of his native Igbo community.

The other term “abrogation” is described as: “A refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetics, its illusionary standard of normative or correct usage and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning inscribed in the words” (38). On this extreme side of the debate among others is Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who began writing in English but later turned to writing in his native Gikuyu. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi stresses that through languages people have not only described the world but they have equally understood themselves. He considers English in Africa a cultural bomb that has continued the process of erasing memories of pre-colonial cultures and history and as a way of installing new forms of culturalism (Cantalupo 218). This is not often quite an easy experience, as Ngugi himself was to admit later in an interview, there are a lot of difficulties that people writing in African languages currently have or can face:

For instance there are very few journals in African languages; there are very few forums that wholly utilize African languages. Write an article in Gikuyu as I do, an often it does not have an outlet unless it is published either in translation... or with an English translation published side by side with the original text. (Cantalupo 209-210)

In *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, Bate Besong rewrites the English language to reflect his Cameroonian society. This is seen in the scene where Akhikrikrii presents himself:

I’ll be in politics till I die. I give small bonai power... One small bonai power.. shege dan bonzaar. I go come. Amot, Za-a di money Ma-a

ding Sonara money-oweh, money Mbeng... wa
ding money? Bebele Zamba-a... la tricherie, la
demagogie, la traquerie... all mixed together... Le
vandalisme...cooked together, then you know me!
Essamba! Essamb! Essamb! (1.)

The language is a bastardized macaroni form of standard English (I'll be in politics till I die); Hausa (shege dan banzaar), Pidgin English (I go come day), Beti (ma-a ding sonara money), and French (la tricherie, la demagogie, la traquerie). Contextually the codes refer to present-day Cameroon, a country rife with ethnicity, greed, falsehood and subtle inter-tribal hatred. Toyin Falola further explains that:

Language usage has taken many forms of creativity, to create an independent canon that is but "decolonized and demythologized"; to combine two or more languages, as in pidgin discussed below; and to write English in the idioms of local languages, as in the works of Amos Tutuola. (230)

The vocabulary and word choice in an African novel is a very key element, and its use by the author determines if a Western reader can extract meaning from its place in a novel. For example, the use of *mudzimu* in Vera's *Nehanda* and Chinua Achebe's usage of *chi* in *Things Fall Apart* are both described in a way which a Westerner could relate to, while at the same time the African culture is preserved. "*Mudzimu* is like a shadow. It follows you where you go" (27) and a *chi* is "a personal god," a fortune that follows to the grave (18). Neither of these authors had to employ their native language, yet its presence adds an authentic nature to the novel as well as

preserving it by writing down what was primarily an oral dialect. Some of these Commonwealth writers incorporate their native language in their texts. For example, Yvonne Vera draws extensively from her Shona tradition. She abrogates the English language to suit her African environment. In this vein, Achebe opines that:

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will be a new English, still in communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surrounding. (qtd in *The Post- Colonial Studies Reader* 286).

Vera's utilisation of her native language is evident in her introduction of aspects of folklore, traditional names, songs, proverbs and direct expressions from the vernacular. For example She uses Shona words like the "dare" (the village fireplace where people gather), "mudzimu" (personal god), "the ngoma" (type of drums) "hakata", (bones used for divination) "n'anga" (diviner) "shiri chena" (the bird of light) "Mbira" (spirit possessed by Nehanda), and "Mhondoro" (spirit of the land). She also uses proverbs such as "one does not ask what causes the skin of the chameleon to change" to show the inevitability of change that will take place as a result of the intrusion of the British. In emphasizing the integrity of the African man and the importance of their culture, Ibwe tells the white man:

Our people know the power of words. It is because of this that they desire to have words continuously spoken and kept alive. We do not believe that words can become independent of the speech that

bore them, of the humans who controlled and gave birth to them ... The paper is the stranger's own peculiar custom. Among us, speech is not like rock. Words cannot be taken from the people who create them. People are their words. (39 – 40)

Thus, language is an important tool to reveal their culture and essence. It is for this reason that Ibwe stresses: "Words must be kept alive. They must always be spoken" (40). Definitely in this instance Vera echoes Ngugi wa Thiong'o's ideas who calls for total rejection of the imperial language and concludes that, "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 287).

In the Caribbean society, language is highly influenced by the imperialist's language. Robert D. Hamner explains that in "The Muse of History," Walcott separates himself from African-Caribbean nationalists whose sympathetic anger regarding their degraded ancestors forces them to reject the language and art of imperialist slave masters. Walcott complains:

They cannot separate the rage of Caliban from the beauty of his speech when the speeches of Caliban are equal in their elemental power to those of his tutor. The language of the torturer mastered by the victim. This is viewed as servitude, not as victory. (4)

Nowhere is this cultural rape better expressed than in the works of Caribbean writers like Derek Walcott in his plays like *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in which English and French

words as well as other *coinages* are used in the same sentence in astonishing coherence. A greater majority of the population does not master both French and English and despite their struggle to create their own language, such as the Creole, they are still forced to use the colonial language as a model. Such is the language that has developed as a result of the obliteration of the African languages these people spoke before they were displaced from Africa. Creole, is a mixture of many languages. The writers use the English language for the most part, some French, English and Creole. This is common to all West of the Indies which is part of their constant search for identity and roots, given that language identifies. It is evident that the absence of language signifies the absence of culture and a language is simply the expression of a given culture. To look civilised the educated ones have to prove the mastery of the English language or they simply get too used to it. This shows a kind of cultural dislocation. Frantz Fanon emphasizes: “The fact that the newly returned Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 25). This dislocation leads to identity crisis because the group to which they belong will look at them as ‘different’. Fanon laments that in another French speaking colony, Antilles, Creole is spoken by the middle class only to their servants and in Martinique, children are taught in school to scorn it, “one avoids creolisms” (20). He says some families forbid its use and mothers ridicule their children for speaking it. To make them learn their history and French lessons, mothers threaten their children that they would not wear their Sunday clothes to mass (on Sunday). They are considered a curse and disgrace to the family for not speaking French.

Although there are some advantages that may be as a result of the cultural hybridity, the imposition of new languages on the Caribbean is still a kind of cultural rape because the culture of a people is inscribed in the language they speak; and the language that the Caribbeans speak is not theirs; in fact they no longer have theirs. They have been culturally raped by colonialism. This situation is best explained by Fanon in the following words:

Every colonised people, in other words every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality, finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. (18)

This means that the imposition of the colonial language of *civilisation* on the people in place of their own *primitive* language was the beginning of the long painful saga of cultural rape which gradually led to the obliteration of the mother tongue as the English and French languages imposed themselves. Kenneth Ramchand also explains that:

In the earlier novels also, there is the spectacle of the West Indian writer trying to invent orthography for the dialect while paying service to the notion that he must somehow show that he knows what the “correct” English would have looked like. (97)

Walcott delineates the negotiation of language and the complexity involved in “Far Cry from Africa”. He declares

I who am poisoned with the blood of both/ where
shall I turn, / divided to vein? I who have cursed /
The drunken other of British rule/ how choose
between this Africa and the British tongue I love? /
Betray them, both/ or give back what they give/
how can I face such slaughter and be cool? / How
can I turn from Africa and live? (Walcott, “Far Cry
from Africa”)

The problematic of language is evident in this excerpt. In as much as he condemns colonial intrusion particularly in oppressing and exploiting the people, he believes that the language of his inherited culture becomes the medium through which he culturally asserts himself. He also in some cases and with some characters does a melange of the English language as well as Creole in his writings. Thus in “What the Twilight Says”, Walcott illustrates his desire to fill his plays with “a language that goes beyond mimicry... one which finally settles on its own mode of inflection, and which begins to create an oral culture of chants, jokes, folk-songs, and fables” (17). Ramchand further enlightens that: “By analogy with English Standard English or American Standard English we speak of West Indian Standard English. All these Standard varieties are intelligible to one, but to the ear, they are nearly different languages” (105). Language thus becomes an element used by Walcott in asserting his fragmented identity.

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, there is the use of Creole, English and French. This mixture becomes a vivid representation of the West Indian society and a pointer to their colonial history. Ramchand underlines: “One of the implications of all of this is that the language of West Indian literature conveys more to the West

Indian reader, who is attuned to it below the level of the phoneme, than to the non-West Indian reader” (106). The English language shows class segregation and represents the communicating language of the upper and middle class while the lower class is ascribed Creole. Like Walcott, Jamaica Kincaid too is infuriated with this rape on language when she expresses the miserable situation of the Antiguan who has only the enemy’s language to express the evil inflicted on him by his enemy (*A Small Place*). Corporal Lestrade in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* uses English:

My lords, as you can see, this is a being without a mind, a will, a name, a tribe of its own. I shall ask the prisoner to turn out his hands. I will spare you the sound of that voice, which has come from a cave of darkness, dripping with horror. These lands are seeded with coal. But the animal, you deserve, it’s tamed and obedient. Walk round the cage! Marchez! Marchez! (222)

Walcott through this language satirises the inequalities that exist amongst races in the West Indies. Some of the West Indians did not have the opportunity to go to school and this is shown in the language the characters speak in the play *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. Ti-jean tells his mother of his determination to defeat Planter “Yes, I small, Maman, I small, And I never learn from book, But, like the small boy David. (Sings). I go bring down, bring down Goliath Bring down below. Bring down, Goliath, Bring down below...” (134).

Moreover, the different colonial masters that attempt to conquer the Caribbean are also seen in the language of the natives. Besides English and Creole, some of the characters in

Walcott's plays also speak French. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* this is highlighted through the interaction between singer and the crowd: "C'est lui. C'est Makak ... Makak. C'est Maka..." (265). Also, in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, the Devil's songs are sung in French: Bai, Diable-la manger un'ti mamaille, / Un, deux, trois, ti mamaille! / Bai Diable –la manger un' ti mamaille, / Un, deux, trois..." (100). The song reveals the devil who is the personification of the colonial master attempt to dispose of its victim. Therefore Walcott in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* uses native (Creole) and colonial (French and English) languages to lampoon the invasive nature of colonialism.

In some of his poems, Walcott discloses the issue of cultural negotiation which is a recurrent theme in West Indian literature. This is because of the history of slavery. Since they are off rooted there is a clash of cultural values between their original or indigenous culture and the culture in the new world. Walcott exemplifies this in some of his poems such as "Ruins of a Great House", "Two Poems on the Passing of an Empire" and most especially in "A Far Cry from Africa". In "A far Cry from Africa", the poet persona asks rhetorically: "how choose between this Africa and the English language I love? Betray them both, or give back what they give?" The protagonists in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *O! Babylon* exemplify an afrocentric consciousness. The back- to- Africa dream in both plays shows their desire to connect to their African ancestry. In Alvin Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker* the author freely uses a patois, an English language that dissents from colonial English. This is used in a way to express their dual identity and multiple heritages. When GB is conversing with her mates about Fanse he speaks thus: "Me can't stand the ugly brute. His mout resemble Crocodile with yaws. De father stole from de mother

and that's how Fanso came to be born and is just like his Pa: a criminal" (3). This language usage contrasts sharply with that used by the British characters like Parson Allen. Bennett empowers his characters to use this language to indicate that colonial English is not central to the colonised after all. This constitutes an implicit form of dissension. The colonial language is portrayed as not being sufficiently appropriate to express the experiences of the indigenes. It is in this wise that Kenneth Ramchand in "Decolonisation in West Indian Literature" emphasises:

In the "English-speaking" West Indies, the language of the coloniser has been made to reflect the way of life and the experience of its new users. We have only to compare the grammar, the lexis and the phonology of the spoken varieties of West Indian English with English to see how far this appropriation has proceeded on a popular colloquial level. (48)

The English languages from the various Commonwealth regions become a bastardized form of English because it preserves most of the basic grammatical features of English as well as a *mélange* of a number of vocabularies from their traditional vocabulary. African Literature most often is composed in a hybrid Afro-English just as that of other regions could be referred to as Caribbean-English, Indian –English, Australian –English etc. This new form of writing would prove constructive in that it would create itself a new genre with which new critical standards could be formed. Also, it would remain true to African, Caribbean, Indian and Australian culture and it would preserve its historical beliefs. Bill

Ashcroft et al states, “hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth” (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 183).

CHAPTER EIGHT

Gender in Commonwealth Literature

Issues of gender are rife in Commonwealth Literature. Gender is defined as ascribed roles given to male or female being based on societal norms and values. It is the ascribing of social roles to men and women according to traditional division of labour in a particular society. Candida March states that “The concept of gender is used by sociologist to describe all the socially given attributes, roles, activities, and responsibilities connected to being a male or female in a given society” (1999.18). Thus gender roles are not given at birth but are socially constructed. It is shaped by the culture of a particular society the culture of a people determine maleness and femaleness. In an introductory essay entitled “Gender and Culture,” Carole Wade and Carol Tavris provide an overview of some of the many ways in which the lives of women and men in one culture differ from any other. They state that:

The anatomy of sex is universal, but the behaviours, rights and responsibilities considered appropriate for males and females are social inventions that vary enormously around the globe. These gender arrangements are not arbitrary, but rather depend on the economic realities and other practical conditions all the duties, rights, and behaviours a culture considers appropriate for males and females, is a social invention. (Wade and Tavris *Gender and Culture* 5-16)

Simone de Beauvoir in “Woman and the Other” examines the condition of the woman and her relation to the man focusing on the ‘other’ status of the woman. They state that the woman is “defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her. She is the inessential, the incidental as opposed to the essential. She is the subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other” (283). This has become the focus of many female writers. Buchi Emecheta, Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai expose cruel treatment by patriarchal institutions in most of their novels. Feminists’ writers have tried to represent the dilemma of the woman in their creative works. The American feminist Kate Millet in the phrase “sexual politics” sums up this relationship of inequality between the sexes (Peck and Coyle 167). While this situation, for the most part, is an expression of the cultural realities around the globe, it is important to note that this tendency is equally having its toll on critical perspectives.

Male writers in earlier novels present gender stereotypes in their novels. Men are created to be rational, fierce, bold, rational and stern. Women were fashioned to be emotional, gullible, cunning, dependent and sometimes sexually promiscuous. But feminist writings break the stereotype by refashioning women from the stereotypes and having traits such as being responsible, wise, rational, bold, stern and independent. In most areas of the Commonwealth today, women have suffered forms of oppressions and exploitations resulting from the domineering patriarchal structures that have for generations “failed to recognize women as individuals with minds, interests and talents of their own (Taylor 76). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” states that “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as

female is even more deeply in shadow” (Ashcroft 28). What this means is that the woman is doubly ‘colonised’ by her colonial master and the men in her life (father, brother, husband, lover).

Feminist consciousness is another means through which Commonwealth writers’ dissent. Today we have gynocriticism- This is criticism that focuses on women as writers as distinct from the feminist critique of male authors. Women writers write from a different perspective, while male writers write from a different perspective. Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting*, Arundhati Roy’s *The god of Small Things*, Nadine Gordimer’s *None to Accompany Me*, Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen*, *The Bride Price*, Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, and Bessie Head’s *Maru* and *A Question of Power* are representative of female voices and the predicament of the woman.

Male writers seem to concentrate more on colonial, neocolonial, racial, political issues along with patriarchy. Most often, female characters compromise their identity in order to fit into the norms and values of their societies. Those who exhibit masculine traits are considered misfits. They fight against stereotypes and misogynistic men. However, female writers concentrate on feminist consciousness particularly the way patriarchal institutions and ideologies impact on the female characters. Consequently, their literary texts critique the woman’s continuous marginalisation by exemplifying the consequences of oppression on the woman. Some of these authors through their literary creations attempt to show that the continuous stifling of the woman’s individuality and capabilities through patriarchal institutions and cultural norms often lead to some negative consequences such as schizophrenia, madness and suicide. Nyasha in Tsitsi

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* suffers anorexia, Antoinette in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* goes mad, Elizabeth in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* goes mad, Mary Turner in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* is schizophrenic, Amo in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, Phephelafi in *Butterfly Burning*, Thenjiwe in *The Stone Virgins* all commit suicide. Even some male writers who write on madness make women the victim of such tendencies. Our analysis of gender in Commonwealth is based on Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting*,(India) Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*(India), Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (Nigeria).

Anita Desai in *Fasting, Feasting* examines the predicament of women in the Indian society. Guerin et al identify a threefold purpose to which feminists agree despite their diversity:

To expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices; to promote discovery and re-evaluation of Literature by women and to examine social, cultural and psychosexual contexts of Literature and criticism. As feminists reread male texts, they describe how women in those texts are constrained in culture and society... The male tradition can be supplemented or replaced with a new female tradition. With new methodologies, feminist literary critics quickly find themselves moving towards the study of sexual, social and political issues once thought to be 'outside' the study of Literature. (184)

Desai's characters exemplify feminist consciousness. The Indian patriarchal society has power relations between men and women and gender stereotyped roles that clearly position the woman as "other". Often, women who transgressed gender identities experienced more oppression than liberation. Like most Feminists, Desai addresses sociocultural values that hinder and stifle the woman's individuality and development. The discrimination against Uma the protagonist exemplifies the preference given to boys over girls. This is what affects Uma and begins her psychological rebellion. The novel highlights the condition of the Indian woman as influenced by Indian patriarchal values. Mama emphasises the value of the male child over the female child to Uma:

In my days, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family. But ours was not such an orthodox home that our mother and aunt did not slip us something on the sly. (6)

It is continuous conversations like this that make Uma to rebel, wanting an education at all cost. Mama sees no reason why Uma should be doing homework when she would end up married. Thus she snaps at Uma when she wants to do her home work saying "leave all that" (18). Mama believes Uma's place is in the house; taking care of her brother and doing other household duties. The narrator consents that Uma is "an abject scholar" (21).

Moreover,

The nuns clucked and shook their heads and sent for Mama, wrote notes to Papa and every year after her exams, said sorrowfully that they would have to hold her back: she had managed to fail every test: in English, Hindi, History, Geography, Arithmetic, drawing and even domestic science. There was not a thing Uma put her hand to that did not turn to failure. (21)

The narrator writes “Mama had never taken seriously the need to do any schoolwork” (28). Likewise, Tsitsi Dangarembga highlights the discrimination of a girl’s education even by mothers who are steeped in their cultural values. Mainini asks Tambudzai:”... will education teach you how to cook?”(11)

Many Indian women who have not gained consciousness like Ayah who inflicts the worse suffering on her own daughter- Laksmi. She mistreats Lakshmi, her daughter and beats her in the most inhuman way; and boasts aloud: “I beat her and hit her until blood ran from her nose...” (7)

The disillusionment and alienation of Uma by her family and society is because of these factors: as the eldest daughter of the family she could not get a suitor because she is not as intelligent and as beautiful as her younger sister and she is not brilliant. Anamika is mistreated by her mother – in - law. Desai dissents that the oppression of the woman is not only by men but by women who operate as mothers and mother-in-laws. Anamika who wins a scholarship to study in the United States of America is not allowed to go to school because she has come of age and thus ought to get married and build a family

despite the fact that she does not love her new husband who is much older than her. She is regularly beaten by her mother-in-law in front of her husband who, unfortunately is indifferent and even approves of his mother's cruelty on her. Her mother-in-law even beats her while pregnant until she has a miscarriage. Uma expresses her disapproval and indignation and suggests that Anamika leaves the wicked family and go back to her parents. Desai highlights that sometimes the victims and perpetrators of female marginalisation both in India and Africa are the women.

Desai contrasts the superior male tradition in India with the equality of the sexes in America .The narrator says:

Mr. Patton has set up his grill at which he stands, garbed in a long, red-checked apron that ties at the neck and descends to his knees... He holds a spatula up in the air waiting for his congregation to assemble. It is a congregation of two, hesitant and slow/ "where's Rod?...Where's Melanie?.../ Don't they know I came home early to cook their dinner? (164)

In the first part of the novel we never see Papa or any other man do any domestic work nor go to the kitchen to cook. In the Indian and African society men are not domesticated, women are. Mammachi's refusal to speak or articulate her thoughts and through her very elusiveness in the novel is a conscious choice on her part to remain firmly entrenched in Spivak's subaltern. She does not want to disdain her husband for the fear of acting against the dictates of gender stereotyped in her Indian society. Even when Arun's birth threatened her very life she goes through it because Pappachi insists. Likewise Maiguru in

Nervous Conditions despite her education, never questions her husband. The women do everything and they expect their female children to grow with the same belief, that the place of the woman is in the kitchen and that her role is to cook, bear children and please her husband. Another contrast is seen in the shop where Mr. /Mrs. meet a friend, shopping to cook for his girl friend and family-in-law. He proudly says “My girl friend is bringing her parents to dinner. I’m gonna cook for them...I’ve been cleaning the apartment and now I’m going home to cook the dinner” (209). This is not the usual thing in India or Africa for men are waited on.

In Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Ammu is allowed a limited education, while her brother attends Cambridge. She gets married and because of the physical assaults from her abusive husband she divorces him. In the patriarchal Indian society she is considered a social stigma and a disgrace to her family name. Ammu returns home but is not welcomed. Her marriage and consequent divorce have devastating repercussions on her. The idea one feels reading the novel is that the married woman must stay in the marriage no matter how trying it is for the woman. The narrator reveals: “...Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem; to everything she had fled from only a few years ago” (42). The next sentence states “Except now she has two children. And no more dreams”. It means she is bereft of any sense of achievement and her two fatherless children become fatherless and an economic burden to her parents. It is for this reason that Chacko says that “Ammu and Estha and Rahel were millstones around his neck” (82). The narrator emphasises her stigma: “...the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter according to Baby Kochamma, she had no

position anywhere at all” (45). Consequently her family treats her and her children as “caste” kind of. The narrator reveals: “Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarreling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman” (44-5). As an act of resistance Ammu goes against the love and caste laws of her Kerala society. The only person who treats her children with love is Velutha, - the untouchable, a paravan, an outcaste. Velutha works at the Paradise Pickles and Preserves Factory owned by Ammu’s family although he is not well paid as other “touchables” doing the same job. Her amorous relationship with a lower caste is an abrogation of the convention. Just as Bessie Head’s mother was considered insane for dating a black, “the other”, Ammu is considered mad and a traitor. The women are perpetrators of some of the trials women undergo. Baby Kochamma compels Estha to tell a lie that Velutha is an abductor so he can be penalised for daring to date Ammu, a touchable. She says: “If you want to save her, all you have to do is to go with the Uncle... He’ll ask you a question. One question. All you have to do is to say ‘Yes.’ Then we can all go home. It’s so easy. It’s a small price to pay” (302). She wants her sister to make amends and redeem the family name by lying.

Nnu Ego, the protagonist of Buchi Emecheta’s novel entitled *The Joys of Motherhood* is the embodiment of clash between adhering to traditional norms of life and societal dictates. Nnu Ego’s name is an indication of what a daughter means in her culture. Her name means “twenty bags of Cowries”. And her role as a daughter includes a moral obligation on her part to bring honour to her family by being virtuous because if she is not virtuous, the humiliation is hers and the family, but if she is good, the reputation does not

belong to her but to the family. Virtuousness is in a way in this society, synonymous to fertility. Agbadi says “when a woman is virtuous, it is easy for her to conceive” (31). Statements like this brainwash any resistance in the woman to resist any form of abuse because they will want to be ‘virtuous’ even at the risk of marrying a man she hates, does not know and love. Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, characterises Nnu Ego the protagonist who seems to be caught between adhering to traditional norms of life and her own individual wish.

The traditional society records a woman’s success in terms of how many children especially sons she bears for her husband. A marriage does not break because there is no love but because there are no children. In her first marriage, Nnu Ego could not conceive and thus was returned to her father. When Amatokwu marries Nnu Ego, his only wish is that she should bear him children especially sons. However after months of marriage, Nnu Ego could not give him children. Her infertility becomes a source of concern to Amatokwu. His anger is seen when he speaks to Nnu Ego rashly:

What do you want me to do? Amatokwu asked.” I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line. If you really want to know, you don’t appeal to me anymore. You are so dry and Jumpy. When a man come to a woman he wants to be cooled, not scratched by a nervy female who is all bones. (32).

This citation exposes the way a childless woman becomes an object of ridicule in the hands of her husband and in-laws. Nnu Ego because of innate cultural values accept her husband’s

verbal abuse by saying that Amatokwu: “is the first son of the family and his people want an heir from him as soon as possible” (32). Hence, his mistreatment of her is acceptable. Since she cannot produce children Amatokwu tells her: “But now if you can’t produce sons, at least you can help harvest yams” (33). And consequently her marriage breaks “because there are no children”. She considers herself a failure and to satisfy her parents she accepts a marriage to Nnaife although she is not consulted. She is given into a second marriage without knowing who the husband is. She cannot question her father’s decision and obediently tells her father: “I wish I did not have to go so far away from you. Father, but if you wish it so, so it will be (38). Both to her father and her husband. That is her role, the obedient submissive daughter whose life is shaped by the men in her life- father, husband and sons. She accepts the ugly Nnaife in the hope that he could make her pregnant; “suppose this man made her pregnant would that not be an untold joy to her people?” (44). The opening page of Emecheta’s informs us that Nnu Ego having just lost her child goes berserk and her eyes were “unfounded” as they were “looking into Vacancy” (7). The lack of a sense of direction representative of this description is also a reflection of the hopeless situation Nnu Ego finds herself. After years of childlessness, the only source (her child) that brings joy to her and asserts her place in her husband’s home dies. As a wife, culture demands you give birth to children to prove your worth as a woman and a wife. The death of her child is the collapse of her world. Her decision to commit suicide reflects her frustration and sense of anguish. It robs her of her dignity hence she cries: “but I am not a woman any more! I am not a mother any more” (62). Her whole consciousness is against the socially constructed role of a woman. Thus the death of this

child makes her berserk because in the traditional set up she is molded in, a woman's value is seen when she is married and when she gives birth particularly to sons. Her psyche has been imprisoned by the cultural dictates of her society. The birth of a son is accompanied by a huge ceremony, unlike that accorded to the birth of a female child.

Here, she thinks only of her responsibility to her family. Her own desires are negated. And when Nnu Ego gets pregnant, Nnaife only sees it as a verification of his virility: "Of course I am happy too that I am a man, yes, that I can make a woman pregnant" (50 – 1). But having children does not bring satisfaction and does not guarantee a better life in old age because her children deserted her. The predicament of the woman is seen in this lament:

God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? ...After all, I was born alone, and I shall die alone. What have I gained from all this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them. I have to give them my all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them. It will be hailed as a good spirit so long as there are plenty of yams and children in the family, but if anything should go wrong, if a young wife does not conceive or there is famine, my head spirit will be blamed. When will I be free? (186).

This lament exposes the effects of an exacting patriarchal tradition. Nnu Ego's first question summarises feminist consciousness and values. She also outlines patriarchal values and societal stereotype of the woman. A woman is supposed to be silent, submissive to her husband and bear children. If she cannot bear children, she is considered a log of wood. She must also strive to bring them up at the expense of her own identity. The woman's life is a sacrifice. Nnu Ego comes to consciousness towards the end of the novel and makes this statement:

I am a prisoner of my own flesh and blood. Is it such an enviable position? ... It looks as if we must aspire for children or die. That is why when I lost my first son I wanted to die, Because, I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband and now I have to include my sons. But who master the law that we women should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world which women will always help to build. (187)

Emecheta shows that sometimes women are in complicity with the way men treat women. But she comes to consciousness and questions the rules that mold women and subject them to cultural abuse and grief.

However, Emecheta redefines womanhood through Adaku. Adaku, Nnu Ego's co-mate exemplifies the views of feminists and is a symbol of the female quest for freedom. Moreover, she does not think that the patriarchal stance that a woman must conceive sons for her husband is right. She tells

Nnu Ego, “oh, senior wife, I think you are sometimes more traditional than people at home at Ibuza. You work too much to please our husband” (127). As a feminist conscious woman, Adaku knows that there is a limit to her role as a wife. Nnaife derogatory remarks to Nnu Ego when she gives birth to female twins highlight the insubordination of the woman as object. Even Nnu Ego who carries this pregnancy exemplifies her society’s perspectives about girl children. She knows that in their domestic chores constructions the female siblings must serve their male siblings. She shouts at the twins Taiwo and Kehinde. “But you are girls! They are boys you have to sell to put them in a good position in life so that they will be able to look after the family” (176). The girl child is seen as property in this text. Woman is property, Nnaife would say that “a good husband is expected to pay well for a good girl” (215).

It is this preference for a male child that makes Nnu Ego wished her second pregnancy be a son. Even Adaku after the death of her only son laments:” O God, why did you not take one of the girls and leave me with my male child? My only man child.” (128). She too, is frustrated by this because she understands that her husband would not take the death of his” son” kindly. This preference for the male child is seen when Nnaife shows no concern to Nnu Ego when she gives birth to two female twins. He says: “Nnu Ego, what are these? Could you not have done better? Where will we all sleep eh? What will they eat?” (127). He refers to the girls as “these”. Nnaife gives the impression that the sex of a child is determined by the woman. He calls the girls “these” in a derogatory manner but if the twins are boys he would have jumped in ecstasy. However, Adaku reminds him that he will not deny the girls when money will be paid as bride price. She speaks out what she feels, consequently, Nnaife sees her as a

threat to the peace of his home as we are told that he “did not appreciate this woman’s boldness” (127). Rather than sit and wait for an absentee husband, she decides to move to a new location and start a new life. Her response to the whole idea of having children is indicative of her rebellious attitude. She protests:

I am not prepared to stay here and be turned into a mad woman, just because I have no sons. The way they go on about it one would think I know where sons are made and have been neglectful about taking one for my husband. (169)

Adaku transgresses this cultural barrier by divorcing her husband and refusing to kill herself because she has no sons. Adaku insists that women should emancipate themselves from mental and cultural slavery by developing a new way of viewing life. Thus, Adaku asserts herself by gaining economic independence. So she leaves Nnaife’s house because she is not ready to sacrifice her life simply because she wants to please her husband and her society. A woman needs to come to a state of consciousness such that she can interrogate the conditions that stifle her development of self and wholeness. This is the stance of feminists. One means is economic independence. It is this that will give meaning to her personality. She confides to Nnu Ego. “I want to be a dignified single woman. I shall work to educate my daughter, though I shall not do so without male companionship” she laughed again. “They do have their uses” (171). This is an awakened woman who is independent of the man and knows what she wants. Emecheta contrasts the character of Nnu Ego with that of Adaku. Nnu Ego is a traditional African woman who believes that the role of a

woman is to bear children, take care of them and obey the husband at the detriment of herself while Adaku is the emerging feminist conscious woman who believes she has the right to articulate herself and seek better conditions for herself. Motherhood is an obligatory cultural trope that determines the woman's space in marriage.

Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* is a critique against gender discrimination. To her, her brothers had an upper hand in the home than her. As an only child, her family dotes on her until the age of nine when her mother gives birth to three male children within a period of five years. Significantly, the births of these male siblings strain the relationship between Lucy and her mother because her mother no longer dotes on her. She says:

...I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me, her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation. To myself I then began to call her Mrs Judas, and I began to plan a separation from her that even then I suspected would never be complete (130-131)

In her loneliness, she believes her mother has betrayed her and she plans a separation from her mother. Her parents preference for her brothers affects her emotionally and psychologically. In this instance, just as Adaku and Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, the male child is preferred to the female child. Lucy experiences this rejection and therefore resists all effort by her mother to make her a woman. Her relationship between herself and her parents suffers. She perceives her mother's love negatively and resists every effort by the mother to socially construct her as a woman. She thus feels betrayed by her

mother who would have instead identified with her. Consequently, she leaves home and decides never to return at the age of Nineteen to New York. Her mother tells her that: “You can run away, but you can not escape the fact that I am your mother, my blood runs in you, I carried you for nine months inside me” (90). This traumatises her because she does not want to be a prime example of her mother. The role of a woman is further seen when Lucy recalls her childhood experiences with her mother. Her mother is devoted to her chores: a clean house, delicious food for the family, a clean yard, a small garden of herbs and vegetables, the ironing and washing of clothes. All these are constructed by the society.

Unfortunately, far away in New York Mariah reminds her of her mother. She states: “Each day unfolded before me, I could see the sameness in everything; I could see the present take a shape – the shape of my past. My past was my mother; I could hear her voice... ” (90). Just as she hates her mother’s authority so too does she hate the colonial authority. From New York she writes thus to her mother:

I pointed out the way she had betrayed herself. I said I believed she had betrayed me also, and that I knew it to be true even if I couldn’t find a concrete example right then... I reminded her that my whole upbringing had been devoted to preventing me from becoming a slut; I then gave a brief description of my personal life, offering each detail as evidence that my upbringing had been a failure and that, in fact, life as a slut was quite enjoyable, thank you very much. I would not come home now, I said, I would not come home ever. (128)

Lucy becomes a slut to defy her mother. Lucy is a slut as opposed to her mother's dream of making her a "perfect lady" in future. It is this sense of betrayal that makes her seek her own definition of self as well as articulate her views. She feels betrayed her propels Lucy forward, allows her to develop and give form to herself though negatively. This is significant because all what Lucy mother wants is for her daughter to be domesticated and actively attend to her domestic stereotyping. In defiance to her mother's teachings, she also develops interest in sexual exploration. We notice this when Mariah presents her with flowers. Lucy narrates:

Mariah placed these flowers before me and told me to smell them. I did, and I told her that this smell made you want to lie down naked and cover your body with these petals so you could smell this way forever. (60)

Since promiscuity is forbidden in women, sexuality becomes an avenue through which Lucy redefines herself. Lucy narrates her adolescence sexual relationships at fourteen with Tanner, back in the West Indies, with Hugh, Paul and Roland at nineteen years. She is sexually attracted to Hugh the first time she sets eyes on him and they make love on their first encounter. This shows her lustful nature. Lucy and Peggy take it as a habit to pick out men in the park on Sundays with whom they would like to sleep. Lucy deviates from the convention where men approach women first. Lucy's relationships with men do not last. She picks and drops them when she likes just as men do. This is against the norms of her cultural convention where men make sexual advances to women. Any woman who does the opposite is considered a slut and an aberration. She deconstructs the cultural paradigm that men dictate sexual

advances and relationships. Consequently, psychologically and physically, she creates a new order, where the woman can choose and jilt men. This is a violation of the statusquo. Lucy's erotic endeavours are self-examination and they lead her progressively to the formulation of a new identity for herself. Still in this rebellious phase Lucy quits Mariah and Lewis' house and gets a place of her own which she shares with her friend Peggy.

Commonwealth female writers shed light on the subaltern nature of woman and use their creative imagination to express their personal and collective experiences. In their novels, they make an attempt to deconstruct stifling patriarchal norms and values that inhibit their potentials. Writers such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Buchi Emecheta, Jamaica Kincaid, attempt to interrogate and negotiate the boundary between legal attachment to cultural phenomenon and natural response to cultural progress. To conclude, it must be said that gender is a major thematic preoccupation in Commonwealth Literature. The image of women in literature is gradually been redefined. Feminist writers are giving other pictures of woman and her capabilities. Their texts have helped to call attention for the need for women to be empowered economically, socio-culturally and psychologically. Men are also represented in their stereotyped roles. However, we see cases where men do not act according to their stereotyped roles (for example as the bread winners of their families). Both male and female writers tend to celebrate the virtues of manhood and womanhood respectively.

CHAPTER NINE

Authorial Ideology in Selected Southern African Female Literature

This chapter examines the authorial vision of selected southern African female literature. It discusses how Doris Lessing, Bessie Head, and Pamela Jooste's complex views of their society create differing interpretations and highlight their visions. How do they reinforce their message and expose the realities in their society? Is their perspective influenced by personal and historical factors? What aesthetic ideology do they manipulate to satirise, ridicule or comment on the evident realities in their societies? The study is based on the premise that Doris Lessing, Bessie Head, and Pamela Jooste depict a realistic version of their societies, presenting and addressing the squalid and cruel environment of the southern African region; the consequences of southern African historical reality, the contradiction of racism and segregation in southern Africa through their authorial ideology. Secondly, these writers set out to achieve through producing their work, their dreams, their statement of purpose or the message they want to send out and what they want the society to learn. Thirdly, they address the same issues but from different racial experience and the difference between one story and another is the writer's vision.

At the time of its inception, Donald E. Pease claims that the word "author" was used interchangeably with its predecessor term "auctor" (105). The word "author" originates from the medieval term "auctor", "which denoted a writer whose words commanded respect and belief" (Donald E. Pease 106). Donald E. Pease further explains that: "The word auctor derived from four etymological sources: the Latin verbs *agere*,

“To act or perform” *auieo*, “to tie”; *augere*, “to grow”; and from the Greek noun *autentim*, “authority” (106). Authorial is an adjective which means relating to the author of a book. Andrew Heywood in his book entitled *Political Ideology* defines the word ideology as: “a set of ideas or a belief that form the basis of an economic or political theory that are held by a particular group or person” (98). James A. Kavanagh defines Ideology as a “term that embodies all the problems associated with the cultural complexity of language: it has a rich history, during which it has taken on various, sometimes contradictory, meanings” (306). The word ideology was originally used by French rationalist philosopher of the late eighteenth century to define a “science of ideas” or “philosophy of mind” that would be distinct from older metaphysical conceptions (Kavanagh 307). Marxism has also influenced the term ideology. Karl Marx describes ideology by stating that:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time the ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (64)

Andrew Heywood in his *Political Ideology* believes that ideology is linked to the class system. He explains this by citing Karl Marx’s view. He says:

Karl Marx believed that the distortion implicit in Ideology stems from the fact that it reflects the interests and perspective on society of the ruling class. The ruling class is unwilling to recognize itself as an oppressor and, equally, is anxious to reconcile the oppressed to their oppression. (7)

Marxist theorists insist that every historical society is significantly distinct by its class structure. Additionally that:

Every society, that is, embodies a specific relation between the dominant class, which owns and controls the major means of producing wealth... and the producing working class, which depends for its survival on selling its labor power to the dominant class. (Kavanagh 308)

Current ideology theory attempts to understand” the complex ways through which modern societies offer reciprocally reinforcing versions of “reality”, “society”, and “self” to social subjects”(309). Contemporary Marxist theory influenced by the work of Louis Althusser reworked the concept of ideology. In this wise ideology;

... designates a rich “systems of representation,” worked up in specific material practices, which helps form individuals into social subjects who “freely” internalize an appropriate “picture” of their social world and their place in it. ideology offers the social subject not a set of narrowly “political” ideas but a fundamental framework of assumptions that defines the parameters of the real

and the self; it constitutes what Althusser calls the social subject's "lived' relation to the real".
(Kavanagh 310)

If ideology is defined as "a social process that works on and through every social subject, that like any other social process, everyone is 'in', whether or not they 'know' or understand it" and "realism" (whether in politics or literature) can now be understood as the paradigmatic form of ideology (Kavanagh 311): then authorial ideology refers to the ideas ("systems of representation") the author propagates through the manner in which he or she organizes events in a literary piece in order to establish a position whether political, social, religious or cultural. Therefore we argue that in using the socio-cultural, economic, political, historical and religious experiences of his day-to-day life as a springboard to his creative imagination and rewriting these realities; the author directly or indirectly takes a position. It is in this wise that Donald E. Pease emphasizes, "The author guaranteed the individual's ability to determine his own identity and actions out of his own experiences in a culture he could reform..." (108). Authorial ideology means the author /poet/playwright or the writer's vision. In this chapter we are examining the message and stance of authors in selected Southern African female novelists. The author's view as revealed through characterization, dialogue and figurative language and imagery. Edward Said in his "Introduction" to *Orientalism* calls authorial ideology as *strategic location* described as "a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about, and *strategic formation*, which is a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of text, even textual genres... (check thee book)

There are different types of ideology as far as literature is concerned, there is the dominant ideology which is the socio-cultural, political, economic, historical and religious realities of that society evident in the text through the themes the author highlight in his work; the aesthetic ideology is the various stylistic devices manipulated and employed by the writer to portray the various realities of that society and the authors perception of reality. Thus, it is concerned with the author's style.

It is in this wise we employ new historicism in our analysis. Major propounders of this theory are Louis Montrose and Stephen Greenblatt. It came up in the 1980s partly in response to new criticism, which excluded history in literature analysis. New Historicism is an approach to literature, which emphasizes the interaction between the historic contexts of the work. It attempts to describe the culture of a period by reading many different kinds of texts and paying close attention to many different dimensions of a culture, including political, economic, social and aesthetic concerns. They regard text not simply as a reflection of culture that produces them but also as productive of that culture playing an active role in the social and political conflicts of an age.

Consequently, they have demystified the line dividing historical and literary material. Moreover, Ross Muffin et al in the book, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Term* make clear that "New Historicist critics assume that works of literature both influence and are influenced by historical realities... New Historicists have asserted that literature is not distinct from the history that is relevant to it" (239-240). They argue here that a text cannot be separated from history, that literature refers to outside itself and within itself. They are interested in the point of origin of the text through biography

and origin, social rules and the way it reveals a text. It is true that every writer writes out of a given experience and sometimes there are parallels in the novels to proof that aspect of their own experiences intrude into the novels. Thus the importance of this theory in this study is imperative.

This means that the writer writes from the general experience of his society. Thus Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *Home Coming* states: "The novelist is haunted by a sense of the past... to sensitively register his encounter with history, his people's history" (39). He further states in "The Writer in a Changing Society" "A writer responds with his total personality to a social environment, which changes all the time" (47). He emphasizes that writer "Being a kind of sensitive needle he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tension in his changing society... for the writer lives in and is shaped by history"(47). Thus literature is a representation of reality, and cannot be separated from it.

Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* portrays the ideas of the ruling class-the Whites- while Bessie Head's *Maru* and Pamela Jooste's *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter* expose the ideas of the coloured and the blacks about their oppression. It is in this wise that this paper seeks to explore the message that the selected authors seek to highlight in their various texts. Lessing, Head, and Jooste in their selected writings contribute to the moral, spiritual, cultural, socio-economic and political development of their society no matter the race, age and time in which they live and operate. They examine race, class and gender conflicts. A reading of these texts reveal that racial inequality, class distinction and gender imbalances are a cause for concern in these authors works. Apartheid characterizes the southern African region. Whether white, coloured or black,

these writers endeavour to represent racial segregation, colonial intrusion and resistance from a variety of racial perspective. It is here that an author's ideological dexterity and combativeness comes into play. John Peck and Martin Coyle say: "In this way, the work of the writer is like a fascinate that of the godhead: creating to reform and not to distort, to change for the better and not for the worse" (46).

Doris Lessing's, Bessie Head's, and Pamela Jooste's authorial ideology in their selected novels confirms Peck and Coyle's views that:

Novelists frequently focus on the tensions between individuals and the society in which they live, presenting characters who are at odds with that society... It is often the young who feel themselves to the most of odds with conventional standards. (144)

Some of the devices that the author manipulates to send his/her artistic vision are through the point of view- the first or third person point of view. The first person's point is usually autobiographical. The events, which make up the story, are told as personal experiences of the narrator. In third person point of view, events are selected by a narrator who tells the story. The writer therefore uses multiple levels of narrative and multiple points of view as well.

Third person point of view or the omniscient narrator is when the person or narrator is scarcely introduced as a character and everything said in the story is grammatical in the third person pronouns like "he", "she", "it", and "they". This omniscient point of view or third person is a common option in conventional works of fiction. Here, the narrator knows

everything that needs to be known about the character and events. When an author uses this point of view he is free to move as he wants in time and place to shift from character to character, reporting or concealing what he chooses in their speeches and actions.

Margaret Drabble situates *The Grass is Singing* in a racial context. The setting of the novel depicts this characteristic as it is set in 1950 in the then Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) at a time when racial segregation existed. She states in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* that: *The Grass is Singing* (1950) is the story of the complacent relationship between a white farmer's wife and her black servant and its violent conclusion" (6). The whites create an artificial gap between themselves and the blacks. Thus racial prejudice against the blacks is very glaring in this society at the time because the treatment meted out to blacks by whites was dehumanizing- blacks are treated as slaves and nonhumans and semi-humans. Ann Serralles holds the same view as Drabble. She emphasizes that *The Grass is Singing* deals with racial matters. She reiterates this in *The New Windwill Series in Literature*: "*The Grass is Singing* (1950) is now recognized as one of the finest post-war novels. This is because it is set against the sombre background of Rhodesia with its highly explosive racial situation" (8).

L. H. Moody in *A Teacher's Guide to African Literature* sees the novel related to the unusual love relationship between a white woman and her black servant. He says:

The story is developed from a routine news - item; a white farmer's wife has been found dead at an isolated farmstead, somewhere in southern Africa

... The novel traces the events and unusual relationship leading to her death, the real cause of which are more complex than officialdom would wish to admit. The emphasis is chiefly a personal relationship in a colonialist situation, but there are also significant social and political implications. (15)

Lessing presents this relationship as having significant social and political implication because racial segregation does not permit the closeness of white and black let alone a love relationship. The relationship is unusual because their only normal relationship is that of master/servant and anything out of that is an abomination. This is why Moses is not allowed to stay near Mary's dead body in the car. Her image still had to be protected right to the grave: "Mary's image as a white woman murdered by a native must be untarnished and uncomplicated" (130). It is in this relationship that Lessing's authorial ideology is emphasised. Love breaks barriers no matter the colour of the skin or the class of the person. Lessing empowers Moses with compassion, and, in doing so, establishes the philosophical possibility that both black and white can express the same emotion. Moses has the ability to express compassion to Mary in her need for human solace. There is no word spoken but his actions are coded with this care and tenderness for a person in need. Through this language coding Lessing prompts the reader to understand the language of racism. Elizabeth Mansel in this light emphasizes that Lessing confronts racism and exposes its language of coded word and silences in *The Grass is Singing* because Lessing is aware of the power and complexity of language (19).

Head describes her motivation for writing *Maru* as: “My next novel was really going to be great for my own sake, for my own life, for the struggles in me” (12). In *Maru*, Head recounts her life experiences and prejudices in a segregated South African society. In the text Head is both the author and Margaret Cadmore II. Thus, Margaret Cadmore II is Head’s real ego. Head equally gives information on the socio-economic and political realities of her society in South Africa as she experienced it. Like Head, Margaret is born of a black man and white woman. Her mother dies on the night of Margaret’s birth leaving her behind. Because of the manner the Botswana nurses treat the dead woman and the baby, Margaret Cadmore (Senior) the missionary woman is pushed immediately to adopt the baby. Margaret Cadmore I treats her kind-heartedly, sends her to a missionary school, where she is trained as a teacher and after her training she is eventually appointed to the post of a teacher in a distant village of Dilepe (Leseding School). Through their birth, ancestry and experiences we find that Margaret Cadmore II and Bessie Head are similar or the same people. This view is confirmed by Bessie Head in an interview: “There is no way in which I can deny that, that was a complete autobiographical novel taking a slice of my life my experience and transcribing it verbatim into a novel form” (14).

At the beginning of *Maru* the fictional narrator uses the third person pronouns like ‘he’, ‘his’, ‘she’, ‘it’, ‘they’ and names, to narrate and discuss events.

Like one long accustomed to living in harmony with the earth, the man had continued to prepare his fields for the seasonal ploughing and even two brand new water tanks had been fixed to the sides

of his small new home to catch the storm water,
when garden of yellow daisies because they were
the only flowers which resembled the face of his
wife and the sun of his love. (1)

Maru , the chosen heir, chooses to give up his kingship and gets married to Margaret the Masarwa girl, the one he loves to the disapproval of his society who think he is too good for Margaret because he is a prince and her a masarwa (from the bushy tribe). Through this, Head preaches for a classless society. Significantly, Head uses multiple levels of narrative in telling her story and multiple points of view as well in order to make the fiction credible and true to life.

Through the use of autobiographical technique, Head blends with history with fiction and this makes Head's works credible, real and true to life. From these analyses, we notice that biographical material is not different from literary material. History and fiction are thus interwoven. The importance of New historicism in our analysis becomes evident in this analysis. New historicists believe that the life of the author is sometimes material for a work of literature. From the autobiographical information that Head gives, one can easily understand that what Margaret Cadmore Junior goes through in the text are the same experiences Head goes through in her life.

Authur Ravenscroft views Head's novels as works concerned with the general South African experience; that of racial segregation and apartheid. He states: "Her novels strike a special chord of the South African Diaspora, though this does not imply that it is the only level at which the works produce an impact as novels" (175). The policies of apartheid so much marginalize the blacks and coloured. Steve Biko in *I Write What I Like* describes it thus:

In South Africa, after generations of exploitation, white people on the whole have come to believe on the inferiority of the Blackman, so that while the race problem started as an offshoot of the white people; it has now become a serious problem of its own. White people now despise black people not because they need to reinforce their attitude and so justify their position of privilege but simply because they actually believe that black is inferior and bad. (88)

Annie Gagiano in *Achebe, Head and Marechera* views *A Question of Power* as “knowledge of evil” (152), where power is analyzed as essentially evil. She thereby exposes the violence in power as exemplified in the character of Dan in the novel.

Pamela Jooste attempts to explain through Lily Daniels an eleven year old coloured girl, the damage created by the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act and other manifestations of the policy of apartheid, colonialism and racism and to portray these insights to the White South African population who are still deep in denial. In fact she is offering another colonialist, racist depiction of ‘the other’ and she is also presenting a stirring indictment of the ideology and practice of apartheid. She presents her as a wise innocent girl who is able to see the injustice of the racist laws and culture that reshapes the lives of all South Africans during the Nineteen-Fifties.

As a white author Jooste exposes the ills of the white oppressors. In an online interview Pamela Jooste as a South African writer, states why she writes the text:

It's a society that's been through so much pressure...I just thought that there was a story I want to tell about another racial group, the coloured people in the dock area whom I grew up with. For a long time I thought a coloured person from that community would write about it but it just didn't happen. I thought that if the story wasn't told, it would die. So I did tell it. (Par 2, 3)

Beyond this statement of why she writes, Jooste equally sets out to create awareness in her society and make them to always think of the past. Jooste observes and analyses the problems of her society critically and passionately because of the political situation in the era that she writes.

Pamela Jooste's text is filled with ambiguous indictments of the apartheid state. She brings out the contrast between the Whites, the Coloured and the Blacks through the landscape. We can suggest that the Valley stands for inequality between the Whites and the natives, this is because in a real sense, where there is a valley there must be a hill. Therefore the white people are the hills and will always remain so; the natives are the valley and will always remain so, and by nature the two will never meet. Therefore, Jooste is shrewdly saying that, equality between the white and the natives, the coloured people and the blacks is horrendous, that is, it can never come to pass. Therefore through the imagery and argument that as the hills and the valley cannot meet, so to the different races cannot be equal in South Africa.

The author also dwells into human nature as she exposes the brutality human beings are capable of. She presents a scene of violence between the police and Gloria who is injured on the face. By presenting this scene, Jooste is seeking

for a day where peace and unity will reign among the races and the entire country. She desires South Africans to forget about boundaries, barriers, prejudices, discrimination, violence and racial inequality so that the problem of marginalization will take a break for a life time. She sets out to debunk some of the societal structures that have been set up that no one can be in opposition to the government. Thus, the novel can be interpreted as one that focuses on the manner in which some of the individuals, particularly, the women wrestle to resist the conditions that are imposed upon them by the government.

The movement of the natives from the Valley to the Cape Flats is her vision of a deracialized society. Jooste wants egalitarianism to reign in her country; hence she uses the image of the Valley and the Flats to bring out what she has in mind but in an ambiguous manner. The events of this novel take place at the dawn of independence and abolition of the policy of apartheid. Lily confirms this in the novel when she says: "...next year there'll be no valley left and we'll all be on the Flats" (191). This statement is the very core of her vision and expectation that after the abolition of the policy of apartheid, the natives, the coloured and the blacks can all live in the Flats. Therefore she posits if there can be equality among the races in South Africa.

However, at the last stage of the novel, the Group Areas Act destroys Ninety percent of Lily's community and her mother is permanently disfigured by a white policeman. She outrageously states: "If God stopped the world right there and then and asked me how I was getting along I would be able to look Him straight in the Eye and tell Him how happy I am" (307). Of course this is a lampoon, criticising the system that stifles the growth of the South African, particularly the blacks and coloured. Lily wants her community to be together just as

her family was together at the New Year eve and before the destruction of the Valley. Jooste's apparent silence on rebellion of the policy and passive remark on the injustice of the authorities who offer Lily the exit permit, is a deliberate attempt to make the reader to interpret the political atmosphere of South Africa at the time. She claims that Lily is apolitical because as a child she cannot politicise. In an on-line interview Jooste says:

I specifically wanted my first book to be in a child's point of view because she was old enough to observe everything around her but she was too young to be politicise...She had no political point of view...She was simply a siphon through which everything came and that left the reader free to have a point of view about what was happening.(5)
(<http://www2.univ-reunion.fr/~ageof/text/74c21e88-337.html>)

Despite the claims above, in reading the novel *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter*, one can prove that the novel is political in its opposition of the policies and practice of the apartheid state. Lily's grandmother says:

It's like bleeding to death little by little...At first you don't notice it and even if you do it doesn't seem important because there are other things going on at the same time and when at last you wake up, it's too late to do anything about it.... people outside will think people in the Valley don't care. They'll think we're just the same as anyone

else and willing to let our Valley die without a murmur. (274)

This passage delivers a powerful message to the white audience that the people in the valley are ready to resist and gain freedom from the shackles that bind them.

During the apartheid era, the whites refute the existence of the indigenous population. To Lily, the native locations are unknown territory and the only ones they come into contact are the servants whose real names are too tricky to pronounce. Jooste acknowledges the important roles which the servants play in most of the white households. For example, when Carole-Amelia's mother takes to drinking; it is the maid who keeps the household going. The fact that her maid's 'maid-name' is Temperance, presents a huge joke in the context of an alcoholic household.

The novel's title is taken from Lily's mother, a skilful dancer who is warned by her family that, as a 'poor man's daughter', she has no place in the Black Sash Organization. She returns to Cape Town after years in Johannesburg specifically to help her family and the coloured community by organizing resistance to the Group Areas Act. She marches, protests and at the end suffers remarkable injuries. Yet to her daughter Lily, she is no heroine, and the novel privileges Lily's point of view. For Lily, Gloria is a mother who abandons her, a mother who even when she returns "doesn't know how to act as a mother at all" (140). Does this mean that after the struggle against apartheid and the return of power to the blacks through the vote of Nelson Mandela, the oppressed group will not know how to act in this new regime? Even as Lily leaves South Africa forever, she looks down at the dock where her mother is walking away and thinks to herself that "if she loves me she

will look back” (331). But Gloria does not look back which shows that Jooste wants to tell the coloured South Africans that they have no future in South Africa through the mother - daughter relationship which is edgy not convivial.

Furthermore, Jooste castigates some of the stereotype views about marriage being a prison for most couples. She proposes divorce in a union which is not genial like James and Evie who always quarrel and fight. Such a relationship should be terminated as in the case of Aunt Stella and Royston’s father Maxie Davids. Lily’s aunt Stella spends the novel languishing for a typically unsatisfactory male, one who make no secrets of his preference for her beautiful sister Gloria. In the closing page aunt Stella gets the man she wants in Frank Adams whose idiosyncrasy is forgotten and they settle down to enjoy a happy married life on the Cape Flats.

In the author’s note Jooste says:

I am aware that there may be some people who feel it is the height of impertinence for a white South African to write about the suffering of so-called ‘coloured’ people: but stories come to writers in many and various ways and are no respecters of person. If a writer feels strongly enough about a subject then that writer must go ahead and say what he has to say, however misguided and however criticised he may be for it. (11)

In the above quotation, Jooste is trying to justify her inspirations and that it is not good to discourage a writer once he or she is inspired. She thinks it is right for one to argue for the marginalized. She says one will argue that for a white South African to imagine how they might have felt, for a

coloured girl similar to Lily as a child in many other ways, to have had her neighbourhood destroyed by the Group Areas Act instituted by the government.

One can then imagine Jooste attempting to reconcile her childhood friends and companions with the demonized stereotypes that White community has constructed to legitimize their own privilege. Jooste may have continually revisits these events and attempts to come to terms with them as an adult. Growing up in a small Docklands hotel with her parents, Jooste says she experience street life and dock life, bars, gangsters, castle, liners that comes and go and colourful characters like Gus-Seep and Jack Hoxie and Mr Asher. Since she is a product of her society, these realities are part of her memory. Her novel becomes a kind of catharsis. The white community may accuse her for articulating their thought through a coloured girl. The past is embodied in the subconscious mind. Hence, when Lily asks for the family album to take to Southampton, her mother refuses saying:

You already have all the pictures you need. They're right inside your head and in your heart of hearts and you can look at them whenever you like. You probably have enough pictures inside you to last you for the rest of your life (329).

Thus, her memory will serve as a picture, a memorable computer from which she can download the faces of her loved ones.

Even though Jooste declares in an on-line interview that she is 'naturally an optimistic person', she is pessimistic in her novel *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter*, she says: "I have a lot of confidence I the capability of people to change and to get

out of what ever messes they happen to get into”(9). How can one reconcile this statement with the fact that all her main characters died or go on exile at the end of the novel? For example the protagonist Lily Daniels is given an exit permit to Southampton which means she will never come back to South Africa. Gloria who champions the fight for liberation dies in a car accident, Katy Van Breda who is the president of the Black Sash dies in a police cell, and Lily’s grandmother dies in Salt River. The characters who survive are Stella who at the end marries Frank Adams, and James who goes on self - exile to Japan where he furthers his studies and becomes a university lecturer. Those who survived are those who cannot oppose the government.

Consequently we posit that the dead of all the freedom fighters in the novel suggests that the author promotes the idea of the supremacy of the white man and wants the White audience to believe that they are the untouchables. Moreover, although the Blacks are ruling South Africa today, they cannot change the status of the Whiteman. The government cannot displace a White family like that of the Daniels. Jooste seems to sympathise with the coloured people in the novel, she also stand firm to defend her White counterpart by letting them know that they will ever triumph over the coloured. All these make the novel to be ambiguous.

The writers use their histories and life experiences from childhood to adulthood as material for their fiction. Their creative imagination is inspired by their fascinating and thought provoking childhood coupled with their artistry competence. As Southern African female writers their intersection or symbiotic bond is articulated through their vision of racism given that the two novels were written almost at the same time with only three years separating them. They share similarities in their racist experiences even though in different arena.

CHAPTER TEN

Fictional Autobiography and Autobiographical Fiction

The present chapter defines and explores autobiographical fiction and fictional autobiography to illustrate the differences and similarities between the two. Many critics have posited that Autobiography is a vague genre that is very difficult to define (see Eakin “Foreword.” *On Autobiography*; Adams *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography*). Autobiography is usually “autos” + “bios” + “graphein,” meaning the “writing of one’s personal story by oneself.” Philippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography* defines autobiography as: “Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (4). This definition suits fictional autobiography where the protagonist and the author are the same persons, with the same names (Barack Obama’s *Dreams from My Father*, Wole Soyinka’s *Ake* and Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family*). The definition covers the existing norms of autobiography. An autobiographical writing is different from biography, personal novel, autobiographical poem, journal/diary, self portrait, or essay (Lejeune 4). Lejeune further states that this definition also functions to distinguish autobiography from “memoirs moreover, (a translation of the French *mémoires*), since the latter is not concerned with “individual life” or “story of a personality” (ibid.). However, Pearsall argues that in English, while the singular memoir can only refer to “a historical account or biography,” the plural memoirs can refer to “an autobiography” (Pearsall 1155).

Autobiography is a mode of mimetic representation. Dan Shen and Dejin Xu “Unreliability in Autobiography vs. Fiction” state that: “In the now century-old tradition of autobiography criticism, Sidonie Smith’s *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography* identified three major “waves,” a point reiterated in her recent work *Reading Autobiography* (2001) in collaboration with Julia Watson”(44). They explain that:

The first wave of this criticism is preoccupied with the bios and takes autobiography as a subcategory of biography...; the second shifts attention from the bios to the autos by questioning the identity of the autobiographical “I” ...; lastly, the third wave challenges and tries to subvert the whole notion of autobiographical writing as being referential in nature. (45)

Evelyn J. Hinz locates the beginning of the “dramatic lineage of auto/biography” in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the “oldest attempt to define the generic features of drama” (198). It is significant to note that the word “autobiography” was first employed in 1809- at the height of the Romantic period – and that the first formal use of the word “autobiography” in publishing was in 1834 when W.P. Scargill’s volume *The Autobiography of a Dissenting Minister* was printed (*The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Vol.8, Ed. Boris Ford). Fiction is a vague and general term for an imaginative work, usually prose. Dan Shen and Dejin Xu further illustrate that

The difference between fiction and autobiography in terms of narrative levels is obvious. In fiction, we are only concerned with how the narrator

rearranges the textual story within the boundary of the text, whereas in autobiography our concern is twofold: we also have to consider to what extent the textual story is true to the “real” personal experiences (however difficult the access to the “real”). That is to say, the narratological discussion of (among other elements) order, duration, and frequency in autobiography may involve both the textual and the extra textual worlds. (46)

In fiction generally, particularly prose fiction (Novel) the autobiographical fiction is predominant as a matter of style in the novel form. Fiction is now used in general for the following: the novel, the short story, the novella and related genres. An autobiography is an account of a person’s life by him – or herself. J.A. Cuddon says that an autobiography may be largely fictional (637). Rousseau’s *Confessions* (published posthumously in 1781 and 1788) are a case in point. They are unreliable as literal truth but they have a different literary value.

J. A. Cuddon asserts that: “during the 18th Century we find there is some connection between autobiography and the then relatively new form of the novel” (70). For example Cuddon asserts that Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is an autobiographical fiction or fictionalized autobiography. A good deal of fiction has been fairly thinly disguised autobiography; and there has been an enormous quantity of it in the last fifty years owing, in considerable measure, to the development of the stream of consciousness technique. From early in the 19th century autobiography of almost every kind (factual, detached, narrative, self –communing narrative, ‘progress of the soul’ narrative) has proliferated.

The significance of this genre in Commonwealth Literature cannot be overemphasized. Elleke Boehmer asserts that “writing biographies and autobiographies was for postcolonial writers an act of individual and collective assertiveness and reconstruction” (192).

Differences between Fictional Autobiography and Autobiographical Fiction.

The difference between fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction is that the fictional autobiography is written by the author/autograph and this same author is the hero because he is the stream of consciousness while the autobiographical fiction is written by an author, this author, is not the narrator nor a participant but a recorder of events. The author and narrator of fictional autobiography are one. Phelan explains that this is so because it is “an art of direct telling from author to audience.” She however stresses that there can occur “the autobiographical exception, “where the (implied) author resorts to “the art of indirection” by adopting a voice (or voices) other than that of his or her present self (Phelan 67). Wole Soyinka’s *Ake*, Barack Obama’s *Dreams From My Father* are examples of fictional autobiography while J.M. Coetzee’s *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*, Bessie Head’s *Maru*, and *A Question of Power*, Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* are examples of autobiographical fiction. For example in *Running in the Family* Michael Ondaatje’s narrates his family life . The author searches for his father and his cultural roots, just as Obama searches for his roots in *Dreams from My Father*. Michael Ondaatje in the section titled “Asia” states that the narrator “I” will be “travelling back to the family I had grown from” (16), a family identified as “Ondaatje” in the section “Jaffna Afternoons.” Thus the author,

narrator and the protagonist' of the novel are one. S. Leigh Matthews emphasizes that "This narrative 'I,' engaged in a search for the father, provides the mimetic or referential quality" (353-354). He further explains that Though *Running* opens with an untitled and italicized section which refers to the writer-protagonist as "he," in the rest of the text the "I" clearly meets the criteria of Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact--the agreement with the reader that author, narrator, and protagonist are one" (354). This why we refer to this Sri-Lacan Canadian author's novel *Running in the family*, Wole Soyinka's *Ake: Years of Childhood* and Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* as a fictional autobiography.

Moreover, R.O. Oriaku asserts that "the autobiographer uses details from his life to portray his self-image but an autobiographical novelist would use the same details to express universal meaning" (154). This is the sense we get in *No Telephone to Heaven*. The Savages in *No Telephone to Heaven* kind of chronicles the experiences of the coloured author. The Savages who are light-skinned represent the predicament of coloured West Indian face in the Diaspora. The novel as a text of representation becomes a "collective unconsciousness" shared by all the coloured people in the USA. Clare's parents especially her father pushed her to live with her false identity. Clare's experience can be reflected in the life of the author for she too had to pass for white thus living a split life. Anke Johannmeyer confirms:

The author's own experiences of being urged to 'pass for white' are reflected in Clare Savage, the protagonist of *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, who feels split between two worlds: a world in which she is privileged because of her light skin,

and a world which never wholly accepts her because of her mixed heritage. (1)

The author of *No Telephone To Heaven* experienced the trauma of a split personality, thus, she recreates characters who portray the actual situation of the Jamaican in the Diaspora when it comes to the struggle for identity. It is for this reason that the novel could be termed autobiographical fiction because it incorporates personal and communal realities.

Moreover in autobiographical fiction the characters are not real life characters, that is, the characters are not true even if the story is true (Head's *Maru*, Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, Jamaica Kincaid *Lucy*, and *Annie John*) but the fictional autobiography, the character/s is true, but the story might be disjointed because few can recall clear details of their early life and are therefore dependent on other people's impressions of necessity equally unreliable(Soyinka's *Ake: Years of Childhood* Obama's *Dreams from my Father*).

Significantly, everyone tends to remember what he wants to remember. According to J. A. Cuddon, disagreeable facts are sometimes glossed over or repressed, truth may be distorted for the sake of convenience or harmony and the omissions of time may obscure as much as they reveal (68). Wole Soyinka's *Ake* can be described as fictional autobiography while Bessie Head's *Maru* and Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* could be described as autobiographical fiction. There are several parts in these novels which are slices of the authors' lives as well as experiences of some people in their generation. Moreover, Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* and Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* have a strong biographical element because they present the lives and times

of characters seeking self-understanding, against the backdrop of an oppressive culture, from first-hand experience.

The principle of autobiographical fiction is predicated on the fact that it is close to history and the stories can be verified. According to Simon Gikandi, most autobiographical authors for example, Mongo Beti try to deal with two problems of autobiographical narrative, i.e. the effectiveness of temporal transfer in a work where past, present and future influence each other almost interchangeably; and the question of hero- reader identification(45).

Furthermore the fictional autobiography is normally written in the first person narrative. Some theorists of the novel have argued that a novel in the first person rarely succeeds in fusing the illusion of presentness in the novel and the immediacy of the dramatised action, that the reader is not able to identify with the experiences of the hero because they seem remote in time, part of a past that is no longer part of his personality. A. A. Mendilow insists that the essence of this is that “retrospective and that there is an avowed temporal distance between the fictional time – his time of regarding those events” (106).

On the other hand the use of the third –person narrative voice allows the author to explore not only on the subconscious thoughts of his main character, but to compare and contrasts (i.e. the protagonist’s) vision with that of the other characters (See Head’s *Maru*, Emecheta’ *Second Class Citizen etc*). The limited presence of author , according to Simon Gikandi “allows the real author to take the reader out of his protagonist’s mind and see him and his world from the vantage point of a character who takes a different view”(61). This contrast of thoughts, views and motives creates the irony of the

novel, which is not the irony of tone of narrative method, but of the larger universal experiences the characters are caught up in.

Furthermore, another distinguishing element between fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction is that in the former the novel is governed by a verifiable historical truth while the latter's truth is determined by his purpose of writing and, by a striving for universal truth. Louis D. Rubin states that the autobiographical novel "is by no means a direct one-to-one description of the events of the author's life" (398). He deemphasises the importance of the relationship between the life of the author and the content of his autobiographical novel. According to him we know a novel is autobiographical not from our familiarity with the author's life but "from the way the story is written, by the kind of details, by the value placed on certain events – very important events, often, which nevertheless are obviously being remembered, recaptured" (397). In fictional autobiography, there is only a pretended or pseudo-autobiography where, according to Mineke Schipper the author who is "striving for the illusion of reality" uses the autobiography – form as "a sort of certificate of reality" (73).

Another distinction is that the authors of autobiographical fiction according to R.O Oriaku "straddle the two realms of history and literature more effectively as well as appeal to both the general reader and the literary purist" (158). He further advances that the autobiographical novelist is not bound to his past, his vision encompasses the present and the future with emphasis on the future but, as in the straight autobiography, this is informed by what had been the past (158). In both types of autobiography, there is the element of the intermingling of fact and fiction.

It is important to state the relationship between the reader/audience and the author in autobiography as opposed to

fiction. Dan Shen and Dejin Xu cite four reading positions as first put forward by Peter Rabinowitz :

(1) the flesh-and-blood audience (the reading position related to a reader's particularity and social identity), (2) the authorial audience (the ideal reading position, corresponding to the implied author, understanding the text perfectly, and unlike the narrative audience, aware of the fictitiousness of the work, (3) the narrative audience (the observer role within the world of the fiction, treating the fictional action as real), and (4) the ideal narrative audience (the ideal reading position for which the narrator is telling the story). (46)

Autobiographical fiction embodies a collective unconscious of the communities the various authors come from. Autobiographical fiction is the personal writing about a significant event or period in the writer's life. Autobiographic memory is an imagination which is created alive in words. Moreover, the writers reveal instinctual or repressed selves in their novels without realizing they have done so. Thus, we submit that the unconscious plays a role in creativity. The struggle for control and the necessity to express their selves are the precipitating psychological occasion for the composition of their novels.

Through the use of autobiographical technique writers like Head, Emecheta, and Kincaid successfully integrate the development of vital fictional characters with objective life experience similar to theirs, in order to bring out the history of their lives in the context of their fiction. Fiction is blended with history and this makes their works credible, real and true to

life. These novels can also be considered as apprenticeship novels/ Bildungsroman that is, a novel which follows the growth and development of the protagonist from childhood to adolescence. *Maru*, *Second Class Citizen*, *Annie John* and *Lucy* can all be classified as Bildungsroman and examine in a detailed and critical manner the growth and development of the protagonist from childhood to maturity through a troubled quest for identity, self assertion and self liberation. These novels are autobiographical fictions.

Thus for female writers autobiography as a genre becomes a form of protest and revelation literature, where the female writers try to cry against the injustices they face as subordinate human beings. It becomes the form in which the women, though silenced; determine not to let their experience mar their visions for themselves and aspirations. It acts a springboard to other women going through these traumatic experiences to revive themselves and fight for liberation. Their stories transgress personal stories to communal and call for a reevaluation of such socio-cultural and traditional norms which have hitherto stifled the growth of the girl-child in the society. Thus, their novels can be seen as feminine bibles of the predicament and intricacies of a woman's life.

Finally, we have tried to portray the differences between fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction : author – protagonist in the former, author - characterization in the latter, personal experiences remain personal in the former while in the latter it has universal meanings; characters are real in the former while in the latter they are not real, the story is true, the fictional autobiography is always written in the first person narrative while the autobiographical fiction is written both in second and third persons pronoun narrative and seldom, in the first person; the fictional autobiographer is governed by a

verifiable historical truth while the autobiographical fiction is determined by his/her purpose of writing, - a striving for universal truth; and finally, the latter is bound to his past. Hence, the autobiographical fiction is more predominant as a novel form. Autobiography can be personal, collective, fictional or historical.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A Sociocultural Analysis of Isidore Okpewho's Novel *Call Me By My Rightful Name*

Sociocultural criticism is based on the conviction that man's relation to society is of primordial importance. This is significant because an understanding of an artist's society, its norms, values and culture will enhance the critical response to a work of art. Significantly, Bronislaw Malinowski first introduced the sociological approach to artistic analysis as "a theory of basic needs, and a derivation of instrumental and integrative imperatives" (1994:41). Wilbur Scott also asserts that "art is not created in a vacuum, it is the work not simply of a person, but of an anchor fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which he is important because he articulates part" (123). Isidore Okpewho's novel *Call Me by My Rightful Name* reconstructs and represents the consequences of slavery and identity quest on Africans in the Diaspora. These include discrimination, identity negotiations, fragmentation, trauma and victimization. The Diaspora of Otis ancestors is consequent upon the enslavement of Africans and eventual transportation to Britain, America and the Caribbean. This is known as victim Diaspora because the Africans are victims of their predicaments.

In line with investigating the society on which *Call Me by My Rightful Name* is based we are going to examine the line between society and culture using the cultural criticism. Schadel and Ridl in *Approaching Literature in the 21st Century* contend that "cultural criticism explores the relationship between an author and her/his work and the cultural context in which they exist. An author writing at a specific time in a

specific place, inevitably is influenced by contemporary events...” (1498). They further state that cultural critics:

concentrate on the way a work embodies a cultural context, how the events, ideas, or attitudes in a work were influenced by the economic conditions, political situation, or social conventions existing when it was written; but they also explore the way a work exists as a part of a culture and how it can influence and perhaps change the economic conditions, political situation, or social conventions of its time or later times. (1498)

In the case of this study, we would examine the society and culture in *Call Me By my Rightful Name*, by assessing the social factors at work in the novel as well as the cultural elements present.

The novel is set between three world orders, the pre-colonial African, postcolonial African and contemporary American society. These three settings influence his creative consciousness and affect the structure of the novel. The novel is subdivided into three parts. Part one is made up of six chapters, part two has four chapters and part three is written in epistolary form and is made up of twenty-nine letters. Consequently the novel has three plots.

Isidore Okpewho's *Call Me By My Rightful Name* chronicles the story of a family whose ancestors were captured in Africa as slaves and taken to America. Three generations after, the forbear of this slave, now an African American is possessed with the spirit of his ancestors and he needs to retrace his original roots. Ancestral past is transmitted through spirit possession, dreams/trances. The killing of Otis' great

great grandfather and the capture of his great grandfather represent a pivotal episode in the novel because it is a reflection of colonial intrusion and slavery. It is this episode that leads to Otis' spirit possession on his "twenty-first birthday" (3). The *oriki* (Praise chant) embodies the substance of the people and must be completed. It is only this that can bring about Otis' healing. The cultural implications of this episode steep the story against the supernatural aspect of African culture and dynamics. As an African American, Otis is not used to this supernatural aspect of his origins. That is why he and his parents become so worried and they think he is having a mental breakdown.

Otis is taken to a psychiatrist-Prof. Fishbein- to diagnose his problem. He refers them to an anthropologist-Prof. Baldwin a scholar of Yoruba language - who in turn identifies a part of the recorded message and sends them to his one time student Prof. Alabi-a scholar of Yoruba language and culture. Prof. Alabi listens to the tape and reads the text chant by Prof. Baldwin's dictograph; comes out with a transcript of Otis chants and identifies it as an *oriki* of a family. He identifies the Yoruba language as from Ekiti land in Ondo state. Mr. Hampton Jeremiah is advised to take his son to Africa since his problems are pointing to that direction of spirit possession. Mrs. Hampton is so worried about the state of her son that she tries to think: she tries to recall if there is something in her family past that could be responsible. She is brought up by her aunt after she is separated from her brother and sister who are adopted by a childless couple. Her parents die when she is very young and so she cannot recall them. Her aunt who does not have a child refuses to let her go with her brother and sister. After her education she gets a job at Boston and gets married to Mr. Hampton. Thus she does not know

anything about her past. Mr. Hampton can only remember that his father tells him that their grandfather came as a slave to USA.

Mr. Hampton cannot understand why his son is the chosen victim for spirit possessions. Otis asks himself many questions, “Why me? And why Africa? But why should he be made to champion the cause of the race with neurosis no one seem so far to have an answer for?” (57). Mr. Hampton sees his son’s predicament as a double tragedy. The narrator writes: “A question continually exercised his mind all through his flight why must the black man’s dilemmas in America be forever referable to Africa: haven’t we lived long enough to find our solutions here? (60). This is a very significant question and statement because it reveals the psychological disturbance of African-American and the problem of identity negotiation. The importance of this is that African - Americans are not fully accepted as Americans or that they see themselves as neither /nor. They cannot deny their past because of the colour of their skin which betrays their race. He and his wife are scared of taking their son to Africa. They have the notion that Africa is primitive and believe the barbaric stories they have heard about Africa. Conversely, Fishbein emphasises “I think the solution to your son’s problem does not lie in this country” (73). Hampton is confused but Otis’s last attack of spasms makes the journey to Africa inevitable. This is where part one ends.

Part two opens with the aged twins- Kehinde and Taiwo. The twins have dreams-strange dreams. Kehinde dreams of the Frankolin eagle, a journey of peace with company not of its kind. Taiwo dreams of birds which fly uncomfortably to a spot in the bush where little kids play and these birds carry twigs of palm trees in their beaks. These dreams are interpreted as deferment of death and a prospect of

a new lease of life for them. Memory is manipulated by the twins, as they revisit the past to reflect it in the present. They represent this past through memorising. They are the representatives of their family and even though too old they cannot die because their family name will perish. They have intuition that they have a brother somewhere.

The setting shifts to America. In America Melba Hampton invites Ella Pearl her sister-in-law who is a staunch Christian to come and pray for her son. Ella listens to the tape and tells Melba and Hampton that it is the spirit of their ancestors that is behind the spirit possession. Ella Pearl insists that there is need for Otis to go back to Africa as proposed by the professor. Otis hears a voice saying "*you servant of Ogun prepare to enter the hallowed grove of your god*" (93). This statement is equally significant. It attests that Otis is a servant of Ogun and that is why he should prepare himself to enter the "hallowed grove of" his god. He thus goes back to Africa with his father and Dr. Fishbein, to Yoruba land. In Nigeria, Bigelow the U.S secretary in the American embassy receives and ushers them into a van. They leave for Ondo, Akure and Ado Ekiti. When they get to Ado Ekiti, in a frenzy, Otis takes the steering from Lamidi the driver and drives straight into the bush until he comes to a spot beside a massive Iroko. Here the voice tells him "*You will feel, you will hear. You will learn. You will know. You will be strong*" (120). While there Akinwumi meets them. He tells them the secrets of Ifa that is locked in the coded responses. The twins are reunited with their nephew. And they ask him to learn the Yoruba language in order to complete the *oriki*. While waiting to perform his rites Otis teaches at Baptist High School Ado Ekiti.

The second part of the novel is devoted entirely to the twins. The narrative focusing on the lives of the twins

highlights the significance of the female principle, in the culture's veneration of the mother as source of life, its association of femininity with the vital principle, enunciated in resolute terms in the dictum *iya wa meji*(255) (our two/twin mothers). That is why the Yoruba dictum says "*Iya ni wura, baba ni jigi*" (Mother is precious, father is a mirror). The two aged twins, Taiwo and Kehinde are highly respected and revered in the village. They have been upholding the culture of the village and they are the custodians of the oral lore of this society. The African ethos is exemplified in community living. The narrator intimates "They are seen as the only survivors of their old pedigree. But are so old the village community reveres them because the aged twins role has become a time marker, more highly valued in oral memory of the people, than the combined wisdom of successive rulers or the feasts of the brave" (1). This is so because they hold the myth, legends and lore of their society as the eldest persons alive. The importance of these myths, legends to the identity and origins of a people cannot be over emphasised. Nol Alembong also underlines that "our folktales, legends and myths... teach us the virtues of love, kindness, obedience, fidelity, gratitude, hard work, heroism, Spiritual sanctity, etc." To him, our folklore is used for "social regulation and control". They are said to have refused to die until the day they will see their brother return. The villagers demonstrate their gratitude to these women by rebuilding their mud hut that is destroyed by the rain (125). The respect of the twins and the assistance rendered to them creates an overwhelming impression of a collective communality.

Part three is written in epistolary form. Through these letters Otis intimates his parents about his progress and experiences. Otis is initiated into a cult that will link him to his

ancestors. He is given a drink and a machete which he uses to cut off the neck of a dog and he is taken into the inner grove. The sacrifices are made as directed by Ifa-the oracle diviner. The twins and Otis sing the *Oriki*. He is renamed Akinmbowale the name of his great grandfather and brother to the twins. Akinmbowale's amulet is given to Otis. This is where the title of the novel becomes symbolic. The renaming and the amulet from his ancestors are testaments of belonging and identity. Akinmbowale are the names of his original roots. Otis is very happy having accomplished his mission and the duty his ancestors bestow on him. The twins died shortly after.

Call Me by My Rightful Name can also be described in Abiola Irele's description of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*:

The work has acquired the status of a classic, then, by reason of its character as a counter fiction of Africa, in specific relation to the discourse of Western colonial domination, and its creative deployment of the language of the imperium; it has on this account been celebrated as the prototype of what Barbara Harlow has called "resistance literature".

Okpewho's novel is not just about the experiences of the Africans in the Diaspora but also about identity. The novel conflicts arise from the urge that Otis Hampton feels to trace his roots. The interface between the oral society and its influence on Okpewho's imagination cannot be ignored. A voice comes one night to Otis Tiger Hampton as he sleeps. It speaks in a strange tongue, with words to this effect:

Ifa divination was done for Oyepolu, scion of those who performed cult rites at Ife. He was told it as because he had ignored the ancestral rites that his life was in disarray. He was told to visit his ancestral shrine and pay his respects. Once he did that, life would be good for him again. He did as he was told. Things became well for him. (33)

Oyepolu heeds to the advice given to him and things became well for him. Therefore, this reference to Oyepolu wisdom in visiting his ancestral shrine and paying his dues to the ancestors is the magic needed to stop his misfortune. Thus, it is binding and crucial for Otis to do same to get his healing. However, “Rites, Ancestors and Shrine” are not in the American or African- American socio-cultural realities and experience. Otis is not dreaming. The narrator states: “He had heard none of those words. They had not been spoken into his ears, but implanted into his instincts. From this point he was conscious only of a burden of duty he could not grasp” (3). While celebrating his birthday, he is distracted again with another testament “*The longest journeys begin from your doorstep. The doorstep of your home. You must find it*” (3). This implies rootlessness. If Otis is to find the doorstep to his home, where then is home for Otis? Conflicting emotions arise within Otis about his link with Africa. ‘Otis questions “And who cares about all that Africa stuff, anyway?” (p.5). Immediately, another message is imprinted in his instincts:

Ifa says of him who has forgotten his forefathers: If he does not take care of the departed ones, there will be no one on earth to take care of him. Whether your forebears are in heaven or on earth, care for them, or

your affairs will come to grief? It may be tomorrow.
It may be next year. (55)

The belief in ancestral worship and reverence is emphasised here. The message carries the same importance with the one about Oyepolu. The dictum is that if one forgets the link with ones ancestors, then the wrath of the gods will descend on one. That is why African traditionalists believe that “the dead are not dead”. This early citation in the novel chronicles Otis transformation and eventual healing from the uncommon spasms and unknown language that he speaks; abrupt phrases that nobody understands. Identity crisis and conflicts ensue. Despite the geographical distance and gap in generation, there is still a connection between Otis and his ancestors. This citation epitomizes the African belief in ancestors and the world of the spirits. But Otis is not equipped to handle this experience because of his alienation from the mother culture. The symbolic significance of the citation underscores the complexity of Diaspora experience.

The first possession begins with “a strange sensation creeping over him”. He experiences “some kind of agitation. First it’s mild, but soon it grows to a throb. His arm and legs begin to shake...his limbs are obeying a different order. Now his lips are shaking, rattling some incomprehensible sounds...” (6). He utters unintelligible words that he himself cannot recall after the fit. This trance is connected by the drum music he listens to. Otis is seized by a fit whenever he hears an African tune, rhythm or words. Thus, music becomes a means of signification that signifies to Otis. The second trance is also invoked by the peculiarity of the music again. He is driven into “a state of frenzy, his whole body shaking, his mouth ejaculating strange, unintelligible words, and his fingers now

working free of the wheel as though being steadily pried by an invisible hand”(7). He utters unintelligible words that he himself cannot recall after the fit. Otis is overwhelmed by this experience and he is speechless. The question is why should he be affected in such dimension?

Through memory, the history of their coming or the coming of his forefathers to the USA is reconstructed. It is at this point that memory and history come in. It dates back to the period of pre-colonial Africa, Nigeria to be precise to the days of his ancestors Akindiji who is killed before he could complete their family *oriki* a praise song (poem). This *oriki* is buried in Otis’s subconscious memory and he will not have peace until he performs the dance and completes what his ancestors left unfinished.

On their way to Ekiti land; Otis is possessed and he directs the vehicle to the exact place where his great great grandfather Akimbowale is beheaded. The entourage is taken to meet with the twins- Taiwo and Kehinde- who are the sisters of his great grandfather. They immediately recognise Otis as their brother Akimbowale who has been reincarnated. They also recognise the praise chant as their family *oriki*, so Otis has been chosen by his ancestors to complete the *oriki*. Consequently, it becomes imperative for him to learn the Yoruba language, live the culture, and completes the *oriki*. Thus, he actualises the prophecy of the voice: “*You will feel, you will hear. You will learn. You will know. You will be strong*“ (120). At the end of this mission, he returns to the USA as a man who has discovered his identity and knows who he is and where he belongs. In his letter to Awo, he emphasises the importance of his trip: “I went there because our ancestors summoned me to honour them and to repair the damage done to our family line by persons no longer known to us” (257).

The use of the possessive pronoun “our ancestors” is testimony of his rebirth and acceptance of his origins. Moreover, it emphasises the Diaspora notion through the word “summon”. The ancestors calling for him shows that they acknowledge him as one of theirs and capable of fulfilling the duty they request of him. It must be noted that in some African societies, it is generally believed that one could be taken from a location to another through supernatural means. Brenda Cooper in this wise opines that “In *Call Me by My Rightful Name* we saw the flesh of concrete bodies turn spirit and fly to join with the ancestors, whose shrine has been violated and whose honour has been blighted and is finally reinstated” .

African tradition inscribes that the land of the living is not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. The spirit possession of Otis and his trance when singing the *Oriki* functions as a leitmotif in the novel that represents African magic or myth that sometimes a spirit can possess a man if he desires. The well-known Yoruba *oriki* or praise poems or songs like in many African societies, are a well known oral art in Yoruba land. Every clan has its *Oriki*. The *Oriki* reveals the personality, fame and weight of a person or family. The imageries used in an *oriki* are many times personal to that family or person such that when it is chanted the people in that socio-cultural milieu will know who the family or person being praised is. Okpewho's manipulation of this poetic devise is to trace the origins of Otis. The ruse here is that if Otis an American is possessed and chants the *Oriki* of his forefather, then the ancestors have connected and identified him as one of theirs. Through this *oriki* he provides valuable information of his lineage. The *oriki* is interwoven in the community's organic mode of existence: Okpewho consciously and practically represents the processes of traditional everyday living in the

Ekiti Yoruba society that he depicts in *Call Me By My Rightful Name*. Consequently he educates the reader on the Yoruba cosmology with its beliefs about the world, and its strategies of response to the imperatives of human existence. O'Reilly argues that hybridity as opposed to cultural purity has a very material relevance.¹ Slavery forced the victims to inculcate new cultures and values. This leads to the exchange of culture and the assimilation of new social patterns. For example Otis' mother negates and rejects African culture. Otis intimates Chip in one of his letters: "She has not entirely abandoned her view of Africa as heathen land" (247). Nevertheless Otis the hybrid says "It has certainly been a rewarding experience seeing education, culture, etc. from another perspective" (247). Achebe in "Named for Victoria, Queen of England" gives a significant notion of the whole concept of hybridity:

We lived at the crossroads of cultures...on one arm of the cross we sang hymns and read the bible night and day. On the other my father's brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols. That was how it was supposed to be anyhow.

The novel also highlights the cultural interrelations, between blacks' racial segregation and the crisis of identity. African Americans are treated as underdogs. This is highlighted in the encounter between Norma, Otis and the police officer (8). She warns Otis not to look at the officer and should lie down and pretend to be sick. She answers the questions of the arresting officer. The officer treats and handles them with disdain. She makes the officer to know that he does not have any right to treat them like animals"...Is this really necessary? He's done everything you asked...if you're charging us with something,

go right ahead. But you've got no right to treat us like animals" (9). His confrontation reveals a manifestation of racial tendencies by the officer.

Myths, folk songs, traditions are part of the original life of the African. It is possible that Okpewho is calling for an embrace of Africa as a necessary step of solving identity crisis. The novel demonstrates the importance of the past in the present and for the future. The Americans thought that Africans were savages as represented by colonial discourse. Otis writes to Akinwunmi:

When I went to Ijoko-Odo in '64, I still had some of those crazy notions and fears that Americans generally have about Africa: Tarzan people living on trees, etc. Besides being raised in a black middle class family, there was some embarrassment about identifying with Africa for all sorts of silly reasons. In time, however, and I have you and Ayo Akinwunmi to thank for this, I came to appreciate the amazing sophistication of African traditions in everything from the arts to philosophical thought of human relations. I had gone to find my family's roots in Africa. To do that successfully, I had to work my way through language and other activities into those deeply buried levels of culture that provide a basis for a family as a unit of social relations. What I found there, shock the very foundations on which my outlook as a child growing up in the Western society had been built. (249)

Otis full cognizance of the problems and dilemmas involved in the process of Africa-American racial segregation is noteworthy. The African - American personality is incomplete without a leaning and acceptance of African mode of life and tradition. The irony of history is explored more fully in this work, in a fictional register that incorporates a cultural, psychological element, and is focused on characters, Otis an African American and the twins who are Africans yet aunts of Otis. The twins, assume the dimension of the African world while Otis the link between Africa and American.

Call Me By My Rightful Name is a pivotal novel that deals with the translation of Africa in the Diaspora through the culture, language (speech) oral traditions, music, dance, religion etc. Otis character has an allegorical significance because he is a representative figure of African and African- American historicity-thus a hybrid. The story is embedded in slavery and slave trade, liberation and the effects of the slavery and transatlantic slave trade on the citizens. Through flashback we see the pre-colonial and postcolonial African society and the contemporary American society. The way slaves were captured comes alive through the physical setting of the novel. The implications of the transatlantic trade are the psychosocial and cultural wounds it inflict on the former slaves. As indicated by its title, the protagonist emphasizes on the need to be known by his rightful name-Akimbowale. Consequently, the novel exposes the predicaments of African Americans and the major sociological consequence of slavery, the creation of a new identity.

We might conclude then with the observation that *Call Me By My Rightful Name* is a Diaspora novel as well as a testament of culture being a strategy for survival. It is a black Atlantic literature. It reveals a revalued past, the importance of African consciousness to identity negotiation in a new collective African American identity.

CHAPTER TWELVE

An Analysis of Selected Poems from Edward Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*

West Indian poetry started in the 18th century in the form of oral poetry, folksongs, spirituals and calypsos. Lloyd Brown in *West Indian Poetry* states that this period was characterised by pastoralism and the emergence of national consciousness. He states that: “it is based on the unimaginative imitation of popular literary forms in western Europe, ranging from the epic of picturesque modes of the eighteenth century British Romantics” (70). Thus early West Indian poets dwell on nature, West Indian landscape and picturesque poetry. Brown states in *West Indian Poetry* “Caribbean is a ready-made source of picturesque images” (22). They include Claude Mackay, Egbert Martin, Francis Williams, and James Grainger amongst others. Their poetry was characterized by landscape painting. They were influenced by romanticism practiced in Europe at the time. Moreover some of the poets wrote poetry in honour of the British Empire. That is why Brown states that “the nineteenth century is the heyday of a Caribbean pastoral in which hackneyed native verse in the romantic mode alternates with the colonial’s embarrassingly sycophantic verses in praise of the British Empire” (23). Significantly James Grainger concentrated on the beauty of the islands while Egbert Martin and M.J. Chapmen introduced Caribbean pastoralism and the social conditions of the West Indian. The poets manipulate pastoralism to assert their identity. The second phase of poetry was based on social protest and nationalism. Many

of the poets decries the sociocultural and economic realities stifling the growth of the masses such as M. Lawrence.

The third phase of poetry was in the 1940s and 1960s. This period gave birth to modern West Indian poetry with poets like Edward Kamau Brathwaite. They join the postwar protest against class, social and racial segregation. In this vein Brown stresses “There is a corresponding continuity in the socio-political experiences of the earlier generations and the new breed” (64). This third phase poets assert their history and identity. Derek Walcott uses the topography of the West Indies (the landscape, the island,) in his poetry. One significant imagery that he utilises is the sea.

Edward Braithwaite’s collection of poems *The Arrivants* portrays the plight of the West Indians who were taken from Africa to the West Indies as captives. While in the West Indies they were found in a white dominated world where they were mistreated and despised upon. *The Arrivants* is divided into three sections: “Rights of Passage”, “Mask” and the “Islands”. The first part: “Rights of Passage” carries experiences about the Island. Rights of passage chronicle the experiences of the West Indian in the Island and deals with the social realities of the West Indians. The themes of slavery, homelessness, victimization, and alienation are predominant in the first segment “Rights of Passage”. The journey proper is carried in the “Mask” about African topography and the nostalgic feelings these slaves have. “Mask” celebrates some realities of African heritage from Ghana. The music of the drum dominates the poet’s consciousness in this section. The last Part “Island” discusses the Island itself,

recalls the historic slavery, and the discordant life that the West Indian lived. It celebrates the West Indian's return to the Island and centers on the persona's reconciliation with his alienation and his determination to make the best out of life despite its circumstances. The poet rediscovers the West Indies with the benefit and assistance of his African heritage. *The Arrivants* has two settings: The physical setting which is the West Indies and the psychological setting which is Africa. .

The poems under "Rights of Passage" therefore are a kind of ritual which permits an individual to move from one level to another. In Africa "rites of passage" evokes a change, a movement from a lower level to a higher circle. However Brathwaite plays on words by using "Rights of Passage". In effect the West Indians moved from the states of free people to that of slaves and as such they moved from freedom to bondage. The West Indies becomes an exile land, which provokes the West Indians to search for their roots, which will give them their identity. In his poem "Tom" he tackles the transformation process. The children have been dispossessed from their ancestral roots as the person puns on the word 'seed': "So many seeds the cotton breeds/ So many seeds our fathers' reeds". This idea of dispossession is not suffered only by children but also their parents; since they were usurped from their African heritage for servitude as slaves in the new world. They are transported from freedom to bondage. The image of Tom here should be contrasted to the Western idea of a "God father". The imperialists came to Africa as evangelists and Industrialists who had an aim to civilize this backward continent. But in effect it was a double-edged sword because they alienated and usurped the West

Indians from the land and they lost their identity. The Persona hopes that after all this dispossession, the children since all hopes for the future lies in their hands will rise and regain this lost identity. He goes ahead to recall good African topography which links him to his ancestral roots; like rainboot “cotton seeds”, “fields”. These allusions to nature, history and weather only help to create awareness and a spirit of belonging.

In the poem “Tom” the theme of slavery is projected as our protagonist Tom who is a symbol of Africa and Africans both at home and out of home tells us how the white man came to Africa under the pretext of civilizing it whereas he had different selfish motives. Africans are captured by the whites and forcefully taken from their African roots to serve the white man in the West Indies. Their screams are down as they cross the ocean as the poet says: “Recalls the salt dream/The yellow waves awash/On our shore. “Drown the screams; shore/cool the lashed sore/ (13). This is a recollection of their ordeal on the Transatlantic Ocean as the African are captured and transferred by sea to different lands. The poet highlight the misery in the lines “for we who have achieved nothing/work/ who have not built /dream/ who have forgotten all/dance/and dare to remember/ the paths we shall never remember/ again”. These lines seem to portray a situation of despondency.

“All God’s Chillun” is another poem in this vein. It is structured into six sections. The first section has sixteen short stanzas of two lines each, the second section has twelve stanzas of four lines each, a third section comprises of ten stanzas, the first having fourteen lines while the remaining nine have two very short lines each. The fourth

section is made up of three stanzas of three lines each, the fifth section comprise four stanzas of two line each while the sixth section comprise one stanza of two very short lines. This style emphasises the trauma of the persona and the turbulent emotions he undergoes. Brathwaite also presents the suffering of the West Indian as captured slaves in the hands of their colonial masters. They are tortured because their masters want to create fear in them, since they are “his living vein of sustenance of his corn, meal, grain” (19). The colonisers make rules for the colonised to obey hence “Bossman makes rules: / I am his patient mule” (19). The metaphor of the mule connotes the idea of a beast of burden. The Blackman, the slave is the mule of the colonizer to do and use as he pleases. He makes rules which exploit the slaves. The protagonist of the poem is weighed down by his inability to free his people. The degradation of the west Indians is further highlighted in “Tom” thus: “Massa, yes/Boss,yes/ Bass”. Uncle Tom however prays to God for protection due to the inhuman treatment given to his children. He is scared of seeing his children suffer from” back broken, teeth their own grave stones pinched by fever lynched by the balls” (20). Uncle Tom fears for the welfare of his children and prays to God to protect them.

More so, Edward Braithwaite in his collection of poems uses devices such as imagery, personification, symbols, repetition and metaphor which contribute to give his literary pieces a good pattern. Brathwaite uses repetition for emphasis in “All God’s Chillun”, he repeats thus; “They laugh/ Laugh loud/Laugh loud at me” (19). The poet shows how he was mocked at by emphasizing on “laugh loud”. Also the image of the sea is seen negatively

by the West Indian since the sea to them is a divider rather than a life giver.

In “Postlude/Home” disillusionment is highlighted because of homelessness and unemployment. The theme of homelessness pervades the nature of West Indian Literature. The poem opens with:

Where then is the nigger’s home?
In Paris, Brixton Kingston Rome?
Here? or in heaven? (77)

This only points at the dilemma of the West Indian always in search for roots and identity. The colour bar in effect leaves them in permanent exile. The tone and diction gives a pathetic atmosphere which is provoked by the frustration they go through. In effect the poems attempt to identify to this roots against all other odds. Again in “Postlude / Home” the theme of homelessness and alienation is portrayed. Again the captives are not welcome in the white man’s country thus the question: “Where then is the Nigger’s home? / In Paris Brixton Kingston Rome? / Here? / Or in heaven?” (77). The speaker persona also questions if the black man is discriminated upon because of his skin colour. If so, he questions what crime the skin colour has committed: “What crime/His dark dividing/Skin is hiding” (77). Moreover the racial subjection of the West Indian by the colonial master is reiterated in the lines above. This symbolic question accentuates the isolation they experience in the mother country where they are under the whims and caprices of their imperial masters. The persona further expresses his anger towards the betrayal of the

black people by Westerners thus he ask “will exile never end”? (77). The unanswered questions portray the confused state of the West Indians while the sad tone depict the poet’s anger. Their past remains a constant and disturbing factor that in their minds.

In the poem “Emigrants” the Africans become intruders in Canada, the Panama Canal, the Mississippi plain fields, Florida. They are seen with “...felt hats, raincloaks, the women with their / plain or purple-tilted coats hiding their fathered hips”. These Africans are actually treated with malice since their hosts are consumed with hatred; they are therefore seen as unproductive intruders. Thus the persona writes: “These are the emigrants, on sea-ports quays, / at air-posts, anywhere where there is strip or / train swift motor car or jet to travel faster than the breeze, (51). Through a descriptive language the persona states “you see them gathered; passports / stamped their travel papers wrapped in old / disused newspapers, lining their patient queue”, (51-52). With all these documents, they do not know their destination and purpose of traveling.

Where to?
They do not know.
... why do they go?
They do not know,
Seeking a job
What do they hope for? (53)

Brathwaite here unveils the frustration and dilemma in which the West Indian finds himself. Imperialists had painted a picture of a land full of milk and honey but the

colonised are disappointed with the hopelessness and racial discrimination that are found in the New World. They have no place to sleep because they are discriminated upon because of racial differences. For example White passengers refused to enter buses with black niggers, land ladies on their part refuse lending their rooms to blacks and others refuse beers to blacks in beer parlours. The persona goes ahead to question Christopher Columbus who is said to have discovered the new world in 1492. He ponders whether Columbus have an idea about the slaughter that his soldiers did in West Indies and he asks whether this discovery meant improvement or a return to terror.

... But did his vision fashion, as he watched the
shore,
the slaughter that his soldiers furthered here?
... hat spintered courage, bones crack with
bullet shot
tipped black book in my belly ... what did this
journey mean, ... discovery? Or a return to
terror”.
(54)

Martin Luther on the other hand fought for blacks. This poem actually illustrates the nature of dispossession and frustration of Africans that renders them homeless and hopeless.

In “Masks” Brathwaite celebrates the realities of African heritage through the backdrop of Ghana. In “The Dust” the poet celebrates African belief in ancestors. The persona calls on the earth goddess to bless the land:

Asase yaa
you mother of earth
I will work the year has come round again. (91)

The poet asserts his African culture by inserting his Ghanaian dialect in the poems. For example in “The New Ships” the persona says:”Akwaaba they smiled/meaning welcome/ Akwaaba they called/Aye Ko”(124). The use of Ghanaian language demonstrates his African heritage thereby deconstructing the master discourse that stipulates the superiority of the English language. He also gives an appraisal of the civilized culture of the Africans negating the so called primitive nature of Africans. They sit together in rows, wash their hands before eating.

You who have come
back a stranger
after three hundred years
Welcome
here is a stool for
you, sit, do
remember. (124)

In “Sumsum” the awareness of his reality of being is emphasized and the recreation of a relationship with his environment and triumphant return to his supposed land unfortunately he is seen as a stranger.

My sisters sip silence
Brothers no longer notice
My stool, tilted sideways, for –

gets slowly the slow pressing
shape of my presence.(148)

The West Indian has been dispossessed from his ancestral root to distant lands though linked by the umbilical chord to the land of his ancestors. The persona pays homage by returning to the image of birth and creation and this creativity depends a lot on the child's cord; which helps to situate his roots and hope alongside his identity. This symbolic journey back home rekindles his hope but unfortunately this hope is shattered because he is not recognized and considered as a stranger. He blames his ancestors and gods who did not intervene to stop him from selling out to slavery. The West Indian in effect is seen as an orphan without any shield for protection as such he is in exile permanently without any pillar to lean on. The sound of the drum heightens the solemnity in the mind of the West Indian at the peak of his frustration: "We walk, we walk Nano Tano... / Whips of white worlds, stains of new rivers / I have returned to you" (152).

He goes ahead to take refuge in "Making of the Drum". Where he celebrates the topographic details of the African land. Its natural environment, beauty portrays its glories culture. The drum is an identification of the rich African heritage; the drum in effect is a kind of Homecoming to cultural heritage.

However, "Mask" deals with the theme of the search for roots. In "Tano" and "Sunsum" the West Indian returns to his supposed homeland in an attempt to trace his past.

In "sunsum", we discover that there is a quest for roots when the poet says.

And I return,
walking these burnt
out streets, brain limping
pain, masked
in this wood, straw
and thorns seek
ing the dirt of the come
paid where my mother
buried the thin breed
ing worm that grew
from my heart (148)

He alludes to chainman mythology when he, makes mention of kwaku Ananse - a prominent figure in Ghanaian folklore. This allusion suggests nostalgia for home which is African.

Moreover the speaker in "Sumsum" in an attempt to trace his roots returns to Ghana only to realise that he is a complete stranger since in the course of his stay in the Caribbean for long, none of his families, could remember him as he says: "My sisters sip silence. / Brothers no longer notice. / My stool, titled sideways, / Forgets slowly the slow pressing shape of my presence" (150). The destruction has been on for three hundred years: "The termites dark teeth, / Three hundred years working, Have patiently ruined my art" (150). The metaphor termites now stand for the colonial masters who have exploited and raped the slaves of their potentials.

In "Tano" there is also the theme of rootlessness as the speaker recounts his bitter experience from when he was taken to his country "to seas of bitter edges. Whips of white world, stains of new rivers" (153) and now he has

finally returned to his country, “not Chad, the Niger’s blood or Benin’s building bronze...” Unfortunately for him his return is lonely because his parents are both dead which contributes to his homelessness.

Moreover in “Island”, the West Indian despite his relentless efforts to trace his roots decides to make the West Indian his home thus creating a nation. In this section the poet persona comes to self - realisation and acceptance and reconciles with his history. The poem ‘Negus’ found in the third movement of the trilogy, the series of repetitions of “it, it, it is not enough to be free” suggests that the poet wants something more than freedom from slavery, colonial exploitation, invasions etc. The constant repetition of “It, It, It, It is not’ in the first, second, fifth and sixth stanzas portrays his anger towards a new kind of slavery under the pretext of civilization thus the cry;

It is not enough
To be able to fly to Miami,
Structure skyscrapers, excavate the moon.
Escaped seashore sands to build hotels, casinos,
splutter. (223)

The poet expresses his anger through repetition of words. He is asking for the opportunity to identify with his ancestral home and regain his lost heritage as seen in the lines:

I,
must be given words to shape my name
to the syllables of trees. (223)

The poet also needs an opportunity to exploit his creative imagination and decide which is good for him. He says:

I
must be given words so that the bees
in my blood's buzzing brain of memory
will make flowers, will make flocks of birds
will make sky, will make heaven. (224)

The onomatopoeia "...the bees in my blood's buzzing brain of memory" suggests that the poet is advocating for total independence from the colonial masters so that he might be able to take control of himself and his surrounding. This pinpoints the theme of colonial exploitation that runs through Commonwealth Literature.

The West Indian reconciles with his alienation and cries out to a new kind of slavery done through exploitation of the black by the West with its superior technological power. Hence in "Negus", the protagonist cries out that:

It is not enough to tinkle to work on a
Bicycle bell when hell crackles and
Burns in the fourteen - inch screen of
The ... Japanese – constructed united - fruit
- Company - imported hard sell, tell tale
Television set, rhinocerosly knobbed,
Cancerously tube. (223)

The persona is conscious that his freedom is not total since the Westerners exploit their country to their advantage and to the black man's disadvantage, by establishing large-scale

industries and the local land being used as a touristic site. Also, he is not happy with the nature of black independence since they are still under the control of their white colonial masters. To him, the best solution is to turn back to their old ways. As earlier said, though the Commonwealth countries have a major theme, which is colonisation, they however have different experiences that make them to have different ways of presenting their materials. However they present their experiences in a way that is fit to carry on the weight of their message as Brathwaite cries out in “Negus” that;

It
It
It
It is not. (222)

The constant repetition of “It, It, It, It is not’ in the first, second, fifth and sixth stanzas portrays his anger towards a new kind of slavery under the pretext of civilization and technology. He thus the cry:

It is not enough
To be able to fly to Miami,
Structure skyscrapers, excavate the moon.
Escaped seashore sands to build hotels, casinos,
splutter. (223)

All the technological advancement made is not enough as long as there is no human dignity. The poet however expresses his anger by over emphasizing on his words.

The protagonist in “Island” therefore reconciles with his alienation. In “Negus” he expresses his

disappointment when he discovers the superiority of the imperialist. He questions whether the blacks have no right to be free. The new kind of slavery has emerged through large scale Industrialization. He acknowledges the lightheartedness of Independence in the West Indies. A new vision has been provoked by the persona to have the spirit of self - assertion. Thus:

“I just be given words so that the bees in
my blood's buzzing brain of memory will make
flowers...”

The hyperbole “...the bees in my blood's buzzing brain of memory will make flowers...” emphasises the trauma the persona is in. The memory of slavery in the plantation and rootlessness is a continuous hindrance to his self realization. That is why the persona needs words so powerful to erase the buzzing memory he has in his subconscious mind. The only pillar after all this malice is God, hence the poem “Jah”. This signifies the new direction, devoted to the act of creation in the new world. The protagonist with the spirit of self-assertion and self-esteem wants to rejuvenate awareness and a complete being.

Edward Brathwaite in the trilogy entitled *The Arrivants* portrays their misery, frustration and agony. His trilogy is therefore a re-enactment of the situation of the West Indians in the new world. It begins with the journey or departure, their presence in the new world; their attitude towards them. Brathwaite therefore portrays the nature of the West Indians in their complicated, frustrated and confused state after being dispossessed by the imperialists.

He interweaves the past and present through the use of figurative language, symbols and historical flash back for us to picture in our mind's eyes the nature of insecurity and uncertainty in West Indian literature as conveyed in their transportation of slavery.

Brathwaite's nature of portrayal of the West Indian plight is conveyed in this journey motif which he uses effectively and efficiently. It has in it a lot of changes from departure to return but worth noting is that before the return of the slaves; they became wiser and with tentative solutions which will eventually materialise in their minds with the power of positive thinking and help to solve some societal problems. The nature of West Indian literature from the point of view of Brathwaite therefore focuses on Africans from the journey of the slaves the numerous obstacles they encountered in the new world where they are not only neglected but rejected and their own hopes and aspirations are not met. His major thematic concerns are basically the rootlessness, homelessness and lost of identity of the West Indians.

CONCLUSION

Commonwealth Literature and Literary Theory

It is not right perhaps to prescribe specific theories for the analysis of any work of art. In other words, Commonwealth Literature like any other literature should be receptive to all and any form of analyses from any perspective as long as that analysis is grounded in some relevant theory. Furthermore, the existence of Postcolonial Theory alongside Postcolonial Literature is enough reason to seek a Commonwealth Literary Theory for Commonwealth Literature. Of course, if we go by Jonathan Culler's definition of theory in *Literary Theory: A very Short Introduction*, then we can argue that a Commonwealth Theory is and has been in use albeit without an established standard definition. He argues in the preface to this great work that contemporary theory (literary) is not just a set of competing approaches or methods of interpretation, but more importantly a broad challenge to common sense and an exploration of how meaning is created and human identities take shape (Preface). Quoting the philosopher, Richard Rorty, he goes further to state that theory is "neither the evaluation of the relative merits of literary productions, nor intellectual history, nor philosophy, nor social prophecy, but all of these mingled together... (3).

Being a sub-category under Postcolonial Literature, it is not out of place to use postcolonial Theory in the analysis of Commonwealth literary texts. The only danger perhaps is that Postcolonial Theory might just be too broad without necessarily being completely irrelevant. Theory being an exploration of how meaning is created and how human identities take shape in the different literary productions, it

goes without saying that the identity of the postcolonial subject is constructed via postcolonial theory. By extension, therefore, the Commonwealth subject has a Postcolonial identity (which is not wrong) and not a specifically Commonwealth Identity which is a consequence of the absence of a Commonwealth Literary Theory or a definition of it.

Is there a Commonwealth identity? The answer to this question is a complex one. It is not as simple as asking whether there is a postcolonial identity. Here the answer will be a definite 'yes' because there is a postcolonial identity constructed through history and the so-called postcolonial literary discourse; the experience of colonialism, colonial (mis)representation and postcolonial re-presentation as well as the contemporary realities of neo-colonialism and post-colonial colonialism (the virtual colonisation of the post-colonial subject by 'post-colonial leaders. It is through these various experiences that the postcolonial subject defines and redefines the new 'self'; an identity defined in opposition to the 'other'. Yet in all this definition and redefinition, there is nothing specifically Commonwealth. The Commonwealth subject may have a postcolonial identity, but then, that will just be like any other postcolonial identity. How then can or should Commonwealth Literature be studied, analysed and judged from a purely Commonwealth perspective without lending it a postcolonial colour?

Perhaps attempting answers to the following questions will be the beginning of an interesting exploration of the uniqueness of Commonwealth Literature and, perhaps laying the groundwork for the possible development of a Commonwealth Literary Theory. What is the image of the Crown in Commonwealth Literature? How effectively does the English language respond to the needs of the writers?

Commonwealth Literature as we know today has been through several sheds of definitions and redefinitions, some lending the category to more confusion while seeking to clarify a few concepts in the field. The sheer mutation of the Commonwealth of Nations alone has rendered the conservative definition of Commonwealth Literature on the basis of a British colonial experience insufficient. There is no justifiable reason why the literature produced in countries without any British colonial experience should not be considered Commonwealth as long as that literature is in English. That is why literary productions in English from countries like Rwanda and Haiti* may soon become part of that body of writing referred to as Commonwealth Literature. The defining factor in Commonwealth Literature thus appears to language while historical contact and/or relations with the Crown remain secondary and gradually shrinking in importance and relevance. This is because it is neither possible nor right to separate politics from literature, and the separation of political Commonwealth (the Commonwealth of Nations) from its literary counterpart is altogether a mistake because there is no Commonwealth Literature without the Commonwealth of Nations. Thus the expansion of the Commonwealth of Nations implies the expansion of Commonwealth Literature.

As far as the function of Commonwealth Literature is concerned, it is evident that this genre plays the same function as any other literary genre; that is it does not only nourish our emotional lives as Meyer argues, but it educates, entertains and is a source of social regulation as well as a gateway to the rest of the world. However, Commonwealth Literature explores themes specific to it and it is a forum for coming into contact and sharing the experiences of other peoples across the Commonwealth of Nations. In addition, it is through

Commonwealth Literature that we establish other identifying factors that unite the Commonwealth of Nations. In other words it is through Commonwealth Literature that we explore the “common” wealth, which is partly its language, cultures, peoples and politics.

The vastness of the Commonwealth today and the multiplicity of the concerns of its literature are enough justification for the mistaken assumption by students, and sometimes researchers and critics, that Commonwealth Literature is synonymous to Postcolonial Literature. This confusion, no doubt, sets in as a result of the homogeneity of the history that produces the two literatures and which is the primary source of much of its major concerns. It is a history of colonisation, misrepresentation, slavery, apartheid, and neo-colonialism. Yet, however related the two terms may appear, they are far from being synonyms. While Commonwealth Literature is a specific category referring to specific countries as seen above, Postcolonial Literature is a broader category that encompasses literature from every colonised or formerly colonised nation. Language is not a factor in the definition of Postcolonial Literature because it could be from anywhere around the world as long as it narrates or recounts the experience of colonialism and/or its aftermath. It therefore stands to reason that Commonwealth Literature should be understood not as another name for Postcolonial Literature, but as a sub-category within that whole.

Although it is possible to talk about Commonwealth Literature today as ‘a body’ of writing with some identifying characteristics, the different regions of the Commonwealth have different stories to tell about the origins of their literatures. It is true that much of what is known about commonwealth Literature dates back as recently as 1950 after

WW 2, Canada and Australia are known to have produced written literature as early as the nineteenth century. Early literary forms were autobiographies and travelogues especially in the Caribbean. Much of early African Literature was oral, in the form of folklore and other narrative forms. However, after 1945 writing flourished in Africa and the Caribbean and has been growing steadily to the great repertoire we have today.

It is true that Commonwealth Literature is unique, but that uniqueness must not shroud the dissents within this now international genre. There are themes in Commonwealth Literature that cut across all the regions but there are also specific differences that make for the uniqueness of each of the regions. The slave experience and colonialism as well as the ever present sea and its cultural diversity and the diversity of its people itself are unavoidable themes in Caribbean Literature, while colonialism and neo-colonialism as well as cultural disintegration constitute the bulk of the concerns of West and East African Commonwealth Literature and race is the story in Southern Africa. These dissents do not divide Commonwealth Literature but rather make it a diverse whole.

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