

**Caribbean Angst Purveyor of A Conflicted Dual Self: Projected in Poetries of  
Walcott and Brathwaite**

Anika Tasnim

Student ID: 10203001

**Department of English and Humanities**

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**BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

**66 Mohakhali**

**Dhaka, Bangladesh**

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**Walcott and Brathwaite**

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Anika Tasnim

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### **Abstract**

The brutality, of the history of slavery, explains how the Caribbean people suffered a lot through the uprooting of their genealogy, culture, language and heritage. The African people felt alienated, displaced, marooned both for the cruelty of their journey and dehumanizing experience in plantations. This resulted into them having a psychic breakdown which caused the “Caribbean angst”.

In this paper I attempt to explore this angst through the poems of Derek Walcott and Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who are both Creoles. Being of the same background, I explore especially these two poets and identify where they vary in expressing their view of the angst.

## Introduction

Caribbean poetry and literature is largely influenced by the complex history of slavery, slave mixture highlighting the black and white relationship as well as echoes the Caribbean dilemma. Though, a lot of questions might arise about the origin of the culture and literature of this area, it can only be fully understood after examining the complex elements which evoked the Caribbean modernity as well as literature. In order to understand the intricacies of Caribbean literature we have to be well acquainted with the Caribbean angst.

According to Oxford dictionary the word angst suggests “A feeling of deep anxiety or dread, typically an unfocused one about the human condition or the state of the world in general” (38). However, from the history of slavery in the Caribbean, the rise of angst in Caribbean individuals comes in forth. As the African slaves were brought to the Caribbean Island to work in the plantations, they were uprooted from their genealogy, culture, society as well as language. As a result they suffered from displacement<sup>1</sup> as they could not relate their African reality with the Caribbean experience. In addition to this, the horrible memories of the journey to the new land haunted the slaves. They had been treated as half humans while tortured and exploited heavily by the plantation owners. The plantation owner’s inclinations of the black people lead to the mixture of the white and black people. This produces mixed-race individuals, occupying an ambiguous space in a race based society. However, this racial hybridity triggered the frustration as well as confusion of Caribbean individual

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Displacement” physically means as the act of moving someone or something from one position to another or the replacement of the volume of some measurement by something else. However, in terms of literary meaning displacement refers to a sense of being socially or culturally out of place.

even further. Both by the memories of the journey and the experience on the new land caused a psychic breakdown among the slaves.

This dark and throbbing history of slavery is passed through the next generation of the Caribbean Islands. As a result we can say that Caribbean angst is a juxtaposition of feelings of loss of history or culture, rootlessness, displacement due to the barbaric history of the slavery in the Atlantic belt. However, through the process of colonization these people have been provided with the colonizers language, culture and values. On one hand, they are burdened with the history of their ancestors and on the other, they have affinity for the colonizers culture. Due to the difficulty in accessing genealogies and histories prior to slavery, even today, Caribbean individuals have disjoined African identity which fuels the Caribbean angst further.

Consequently, this Caribbean angst was molded with double consciousness, which is also very prominent in the Caribbean poetry. The term double consciousness was first coined by Du Bois referring to the presence of two unconnected cultural and social identity or consciousness in one individual. The term physically highlights the tension of African American struggle of reconcile the African heritage with a European upbringing. However, in literature the term is regarded as the author's two overlapping state of mind. The Caribbean people both the historical and the contemporary suffer from displacement and double consciousness. Hence, in Caribbean writing these two themes have become crucial. In Walcott's poem "Castaway" we notice a sense of both physical and aesthetic displacement. In the poem Walcott shows how the Caribbean people in a new land feel distant from their original homeland. He also shows how these people are culturally castaway in a new land. In addition to this, in "The Far Cry" from Africa the poet portrays his own

double consciousness. He shows his dilemma by saying: “Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?” (CP 18). Similarly, the theme of displacement comes over and over again in Brathwaite’s poetry. In The poem "Caliban" he refers to the Caribbean as a “dark ground” and “burning ground” (CP 195), whereas he claims that the African limbo dance is saving him. Here we notice the poet is describing African heritage as a savior on an alien island which highlights his mental displacement. However, Brathwaite’s poetry is an absolutely wonderful attempt of creating, recreating and reconstructing the African values and genius which are found in history. Hence, Brathwaite is essential on creating Afrocentricity; the term as explained by Gilroy (1995), as the phenomenon that upholds one’s African heritage by the process of recreation. This is again his double consciousness which helps him reconcile with his African past.

Similarly, Caribbean poets deal with the problems of amnesia and most of the modern Caribbean poets including Walcott in their poems introduce amnesia due to lack of past to express their Caribbean experience. In Walcott’s poetry we see a conflicted dual self struggling to locate the dislocated Caribbean identity. Also, Gikandi in his book *Writing in limbo*, describes how without a past Caribbean modernity “irrupts” (20). However, instead of creating a genealogy most modern Caribbean poets portray the angst, displacement of Caribbean individual and develops a “counter-discourse”( Gikandi 25)<sup>2</sup> of the conventional representation of the native. Counter discourse according to him is representation of the Caribbean diaspora

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<sup>2</sup> . Gikandi in his book *Writing in Limbo* uses the term counter-discourse. He argues that instead of creating a genealogy most modern Caribbean poets portray the angst, displacement of Caribbean individual and develops a counter-discourse.

through language. This has two dynamics. Firstly, it means the representation of the Caribbean people through the writings of Caribbean writers. As, Gikandi argues that “Caribbean modernism is highly revisionary” (04) so, through the Caribbean literature the previous European representation of the ‘other’ is revised. He claims that this process rejects the hegemonic European ideas. Secondly, counter discourse also means representation through lingual infraction. This means that the European language which is provided to the African people in the Caribbean should be used in such a way that it carries the African essence. Gikandi claims that in order to achieve Caribbean modernity English should be violated and Africanized. Only then it can carry the weight of African past. Gikandi in a way agrees with Achebe , another renowned African writer and critic who in his essay “The African Writer and The English Language” argues that decolonizing the language is impossible. So an emergence of ‘new English’ is vital to represent the Caribbean.

Not only we see a search for past in the Caribbean poetry but also we see a double conscious conflicted self. On one hand we see that Walcott and Brathwaite inhabit western literary and colonial culture especially language while resisting against the degradation and dehumanizing effects of Imperialism. However, Walcott’s sense of displacement and sense of identity is a result of his own experience. Besides, his creations are a result of his double consciousness. In my paper, I will discuss how in his poetry he reflects the Caribbean angst as well as the conflicted dual self.

On the contrary, Brathwaite wanted to recover the African roots as well as believed in the development of collective Caribbean identity. Though his historical works are important and influential to understand the Caribbean culture and literature, but have not reviewed the desired attention. He shows an overwhelming interest in

rediscovering the African culture as well understanding the lost folklore. Hence, in his book *The Arrivants* we notice him making a journey going back to Africa in order to understanding the weight of African culture as well as to console his disjoined Caribbean self. In the book he shows how the people of the Caribbean Island suffer from inertia, displacement and double consciousness. Unlike Walcott he believes that the lost past can give meaning to the Caribbean people who are still in exile. However, he negates the creative space that the lack of history creates.

In my first chapter I shall examine prominent historical events which instigated the angst. I will begin with the history of the middle passage leading to the slave history as well as the history of the plantation economy. In the second chapter I will analyze how Walcott portrays the angst in his anthology *Collected Poems, 1948-1984*. I will also explore how Walcott is introspective and self questioning to show his conflicted self. In my third chapter I will show how Brathwaite from a different perspective tries to portray the Caribbean angst. His quest is to set the connection with his African culture with his Caribbean reality. However, I will try to show how both of them reflects the Caribbean tension of lack of identity, past and double consciousness in both chapter 2 and chapter 3. Also, I will try show the relationship of history of the slavery and colonization with Caribbean poetry.

## **Chapter1: History of the Atlantics: Slave Trading and Plantation Economy**

A series of historical incidents which initiates the Caribbean angst, starts from crossing the Atlantics ; the history of the Middle Passage. In the history of African slave trading, one of the most brutal forced slave transportation occurred in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The journey was known as the Middle Passage, as this trading includes a journey from Europe to Africa and finally to The West Indies. This triangular slave trading traded millions of African slaves to the North America and West Indies in exchange of raw materials. “This African ‘frontier’ of slave trading followed a violent historical dynamic recurrent throughout the world’s history, including the contemporaneous northern Atlantic ( Cole 121) <sup>3</sup>.” James Walvin’s *The Slavery Reader* is one of the most important historiography of slavery. The book has a total of 37 essays which are divided into nine sections. Articles displayed in the book covers the Atlantic slave exchange, the initiation and improvement of slavery in the America. It also highlighted family, group, society, economy and material production as well as resistance, race of Africans in the Atlantic world. There are three important topics managing this gathering. They are the advancement of the Atlantic slave exchange; elements impacting the differing way of slave life in the New World; and the resistance, and survival in the lives of oppressed Africans and African Americans. The journey of the Middle Passage is well explained in the third chapter of the First

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<sup>3</sup> The book *The Age of Revolutions in The Global Context* is edited by David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam in which a recognized global group of historians looks at the flow of worldwide and local change in the late eighteenth and nineteenth hundreds of years. Giving remarkably expansive scope, including North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and China, the sections of the book shed new light on world history.

section of the book.<sup>4</sup> However, the conditions of the slaves were unlike any other slave trading or captivated convict shipping.

Typically slave ships are first departed with finished goods from Europe to the Africa. Then the goods and commodities were sold there in exchange of African slaves who were then forcefully migrated to the West Indian coast for mass production of cotton, sugar, cocoa and tobacco in the plantations. These voyages approximately took six to eight months to reach back to England. As, these journeys were both time consuming and costly, so more and more slaves were tightly packed into the slave ships. “This Atlantic era, known to European merchant investors and to American planters as the era of ‘the slave trade’ Africans experienced as a tidal initiation wave of commercial capital, as the gradual accumulation of American specie in Europe, and its translation there into financial capital, overflowed into Africa. In the view of Africans committed to communal reciprocities and mutual responsibilities, the Europeans took voraciously while giving as little as possible and seldom investing in enduring relationships of reciprocity” (Cole 114). The Atlantic slave exchange as a worldwide phenomenon has given an eminence in the book. Hence, we notice that through the compilation of essays the book sets up an inquiry and, hence, explains the complex situation of the slaves in the New World. However, the advancement of the Atlantic slave exchange showed up as a profitable and in the meantime ethically faulty act in the present day world. The book also shows how the European countries and African political states exchanged material products in exchange of humans in the Atlantic coasts. Thus, upwards of 21 million Africans from west central Africa were transported to the New World as slaves (Millward).

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<sup>4</sup> This is a review of the book *The Slavery Reader* by Jessica Millward. For more details refer to “Jessica Millward on Edited by Gad Heuman and James Walvin”

These ships had no proper environment and place for accommodating large number of slaves. Besides, they often were chained with each other and were malnourished as they had to starve for days. Many superficial statistics claims that one third of these people died in the journey out of various diseases and jumping off to the Atlantics.

Often these captivated black people revolted against this barbaric slave trading. Some of these revolting blacks would refuse to eat and would choose to starve. Since the crew of these ships and the maintenance officers were mostly white people so, they tried their level best to cool down such conditions. In some cases the authority would forcefully feed these people who refused to eat. Besides, the revolting slaves who did not want to submit themselves as slaves would gather together and create chaos in order to gain their freedom. In the book *The African Reader* explains the sense of rebellion in the slaves. By creating a family and community network slaves wanted to transcend the harsh reality of their lives. Through this not only they desired to create a distinct system of language and music but also an emergence of aesthetic production ( Millward). These slaves were tortured to death sometimes. However, some helpless enslaved people just jumped off from the ships in the Atlantics.

Olaudah Equiano; also known as Gustavus Vassa, an African Igbo freed slave wrote his autobiography named *An Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* revealed the horrors of the journey through the middle passage. Born in approximately 1745, in southern Nigeria, he was enslaved as a child and then traded off to the West Indies. When he was freed he wrote his autobiography where he revealed the barbaric truths of the slave ships. Besides, he also mentioned that how brutally some of these slaves were kidnapped for enslavement. Though today some critics argue upon the very existence of Equiano and question the authenticity of his

narrative. However, his autobiography even today exists as a proof of the cruelty of this triangular slave trading.

After Columbus's second voyage 1493, the Spanish came to the Caribbean Island under feudalism; a dominant socio- economic system, to initiate the process of extending the European trade. They colonized Hispaniola [1493], Puerto Rico [1508], Jamaica [1509], Cuba [1511], and Trinidad [1530]. Their efforts were non profitable and focused on agricultural cultivation. Hence, the trader moved to the mainland in search of gold, silver and other precious metals. They looted the gold, silver and other precious goods and took them back to Spain along with some natives. However, the settlers enslaved the native people and by droving a vast amount of people to death they destroyed the population. To meet the demand of additional slaves the Spanish settlers started trading slaves from Africa. However, the Spanish could not rule the Island for long as the buccaneers who followed them established colonies of their own.

After the Spanish settlers, the Dutch the French and the British settlers came one after to another to the Caribbean Island. The Dutch settlers however played an important role in turning these Islands into commercial trading station. The Dutch not only aided but also encouraged other colonies to establish the Caribbean as a producer of tropical crops for European consumption. Cocoa, tobacco and sugar were the crops that they harvested mostly. However, the industrial revolution fueled the production of these corps as the plantation owner by now wanted surplus production. The success of the Dutch in producing tobacco encouraged others to produce more and more tobacco until England's market was flooded by tobacco in the sixteenth century. Hence, there was enormous fall in the price of tobacco in England's market. This

impacted heavily on the plantation economy in the Caribbean, resulting into a land and labor war in the 1630s and 1640s. However, from this point the plantation owner started to invest in producing sugar as the demand for sugar kept rising in England.

The growth and severity of slavery was intimately dependent on the increased market of sugar in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. By now slave trade became an interest for both private and governmental development. “As this violent frontier of Atlantic investment retreated inland in violent surges from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, new commercially oriented communities consolidated themselves nearer the African coast by assimilating the survivors, many of them acquired through slaving. The growing financial capacity of the Atlantic economy provided the credit through which these specialized groups acquired their members” (Cole 117). In such conditions slave trading became an industry where these African slaves were considered as one of the cheap raw materials. The condition of the sugar plantation slaves was also very bitter and barbaric. These slaves were shipped from different parts of Africa and as members of a heterogeneous society their language and culture was very distinct. These slaves were displaced, disjuncture and felt alienated as they cannot communicate with each other. They were chained with each other like half humans. They had to work night and day long with very poor nourishment. Hungry, sick and tired most of these slaves were constantly tortured and brutally beaten by the colonizers. The colonizers wanted to make the most of these free workforces while increasing the profit with surplus production. The colonizers were trying to increase the female slave ration. As the editor of the book *The African Reader* argues that the reproductive capacity of the female slaves is profitable for them. Also, they had the fear that the slaves will revolt and they implied physical violence to maintain and limit slave rebellion. Often the slaves were stroked as many

times possible by whip, burned and even castrated. However, the extreme work pressure the lack of minimal nourishment and brutal tortures often initiated rebellion in different colonies.

Talking about the abolition movement names of certain important historians comes in. For instance David Patrick Geggus in his book *the Haitian Revolutionary Series* talks about how the revolutions of Saint Dominique started, how they shaped up and gradually how they came to end with the consequences that has left an eternal mark in history. We see how he discusses that the “Haitian Revolution freed about half a million people in 1793, and perhaps another 110,000 the following year...” (Geggus 85). However, he also adds that these revolts did not permanently put an end to the sufferings of the plantation workers as “British Caribbean sugar production continued to increase until the late 1820s (Geggus 85)”. There is nothing surprising about this fact given that the colonizers were not to leave so fast. The only thing that uprooted them were the constant revolts with that usually left behind in its wake blood and gore. The slaves were finally freed after many bloody rebellion resulting into “...another abolitionist campaign in 1833 (Geggus 91)”.

**Chapter 2: In betweenness, Lack of Past, Duality and Mimicry : Walcott's  
Expression of Caribbean Anxiety and self conflict**

In understanding contemporary Caribbean dilemmas and struggle, one name which strappingly comes in forth is Walcott, who shows the identity making process by highlighting the complexities of the Caribbean individuals in a postmodern era. As an intellectual he gave a historical review of the process of Creolization for which he has been appreciated and acknowledged both by African and Western audiences. Most importantly he showed his own Creole psyche which is parallel to this physical process of Creolization. As a hybrid identity Walcott could not resist his affinity for the colonizers language and tradition. However, he has a delicate sense of resistance against the brutality of the colonizers. This duality in his psyche divide him into two parts, as a result we see the reflection of a divided self image in most of his the poems which represents the complexities of whole of the Caribbean. I will now analyze how Walcott expresses the Caribbean angst in his poems.

One of the major crises of every Caribbean individual is the state of in-between, which is very prominent in almost every works of Walcott. He dwells into this dilemma of 'in betweenness' as a Creole and fails to side up with one culture. This shared love for both the African past and the European tradition splits him into two parts. He says, I am a kind of split writer; I have one tradition inside me going in one way, and another going another. The mimetic, the narrative, and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other (Meanings 1970). I will analyze this tug of war among the African culture and the European culture in Walcott's poetry now.

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
 Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
 I who have cursed  
 The drunken officer of British rule, who choose  
 Between this Africa and the English 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? (CP 18)

The tension between European written literary tradition and the African oral traditions is very evident in the poem. The poet struggles a lot and explains his love for both. By dreading of the rejection, he comprehends that he cannot belong to both the cultural norms at the same time. Hence, he reveals a sense of lost hope, a search for an identity while remaining undecided. Like many Caribbean individuals, this prevents him from acting indifferent to any of the cultures. Consequently, we notice an urge for finding a voice that speaks to two cultural norms simultaneously. He affirms his perseverance by saying that he would like to be "Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" (CP 18).

For Walcott, this 'in betweenness' is so inevitable that he fails to provide a solution to his problems. We notice him speculating whether identifying himself with one cultural norm will put an end to his sufferings. As he claims to be "poisoned with the blood of both, /Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" (CP 18). Hence, a middle of the road policy, a neutral and impartial standpoint of in between becomes his desired position to be in. Being skeptical he finds no sides to choose, as the African

Kikuyu war destroyed equal number of both "the white child" and makes the black "savages, expendable as Jews." Though, he chooses to stay in between the two cultural identities, Walcott has not separated and detached himself from neither.(CP)

In his "The Schooner Flight" we notice how he portrays the inner dilemma of the people living in the Atlantic coasts. In the poem we notice that the main character Shabaine is an unhappy, lost wonderer heading towards a voyage. His separation from family echoes back to the Caribbean tensions. Many critics argue that through Shabaine, Walcott tries to explain the condition of many Caribbean voices. Edward Boughs argues that the poem is auto biographical in his article "The Poet's Fiction of Self". As Edward Baugh (1991) points out, "With Walcott, 'here' has become increasingly a place to which one returns, a place one has to reclaim repeatedly in an effort made more and more precarious and compulsive as the gulf of memory widens" (126)." I will now try to show this inner dilemma results into rootlessness in Walcott's poetry.

In the absence of a memory of past due to colonization, we notice how Walcott's poetry echoes the Caribbean consciousness. Many of his poems deal with lack of past and rootlessness as they extend the intricacies of every Caribbean individual. He shows the position of Caribbean individuals without a past in his poem "Names" portraying a dark image of rootlessness.

I began with no memory

I began with no future

but I looked for the moment

when the mind was halved by a horizon.

I have never found that moment

when the mind was halved by a horizon—

for the goldsmith for Benaras,

the stone-cutter from Canton,

as a fishline sinks, the horizon

sinks in the memory. (CP 305)

Neither he gets an access to the lost heritage nor can he relate whatever is left to his reality. Also in “Love in the Valley” he explains his inability to write due to amnesia.

Widening like amnesia

Evening dims the mind

I shake my head in darkness, (CP 50 )

However, this anxiety leads him rejecting the African past heritage which increasingly becomes a burden for him. Though Gilroy in his *The Black Atlantic (41-71)* argues that this rejection of past and history could also be a form of resistance.

This rejection guides to a yearning for a past which fuels the tension of duality on Walcott’s poetry. For Walcott, the heart of Caribbean identity and the divided nature of Caribbean individual are concealed in the past conflicts between the colonizer and the colonized. Similarly, an archeological probing of history is done by Walcott in his famous “Ruins of Great House”. In the poem as an intellectual he

reviews that the British were once upstart colonial subjects too and questions the absolute imperial authority. Indeed he has found a dual past where admires the English writer and refers to Faulkner, William Blake and John Donne.

But as dead ash is lifted in a wind,  
 That fans the blackening ember of mind,  
 My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne  
 Ablaze with rage, I thought  
 Some slave is rotting in the manorial lake,  
 And still the coal of my compassion faught: (CP 312 )

However, he also agrees that English writers have committed epistemological violence and after watching the evil deeds done by these writers descendent, Walcott starts to question these writers as well. The poet's eyes are no longer burning with revenge as, "We owe Europe either revenge or nothing, and it is better to have nothing than revenge" ( CCM 12). Walcott no longer feels "Ablaze with rage", but has cooled down his compassion to the black coal. Paradoxically, this compassion comes from "the ashen prose of Donne". We notice that this yearning not only for the past is which is lost in the Africa but also for a past which has literary roots. Walcott finds his inspiration and motivation from the European literary canon as no writer can write alone while being a part of the stream of literary tradition from past.

This preconceived notion of non-originality of the people of the Caribbean due to a lack of history apparently questions the authenticity of the art and literature of the Caribbean. Mimicry which lacks creativity often sheds some negative

associations on representation. However, many critics argue that the artists of the West India follow European literary traditions as well as merely mimic their artistry. Similarly, critic Naipaul verdicts the Caribbean literary canon while questioning the emergence of any possible tradition out of the Caribbean.

The moment then, that a writer in the Caribbean , an American man, puts down a word – not only the first writer whoever he was, in Naipaul’s view, but every writer since- at that moment he is a mimic, a mirror man, he is the ape beholding himself. This is supposed to be true as well of the dancer, the sculptor, the citizen, anyone in the Caribbean who is failed to unoriginality. So, of course, is Mr. Naipaul, whose cause extends to saying of this place that “nothing has ever been created in the West Indies, and nothing will ever be created” (CCM 8-9).

Walcott strongly opposes this foretelling of Naipaul and assures that Caribbean art for its versatility will be as unique as “...nothing one has seen before” (CCM 9). In addition to this Walcott disagrees with the process of decolonization of language. Like critic Achebe he believes that the colonizers language has become the languages of many colonial countries, his anxiety for language is expressed through these lines : "when language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes" (CCM 13). After showing how the authenticity of the Caribbean literature has been questioned by critics and now I will now show Walcott refutes these criticism.

For Walcott “Mimicry is an act of imagination...” (CCM 10) which probes to connect and unite historical gaps as well as cultural anxiety. Through this poetic imagination he tries to transcend the history of hypocrisy and genocide. For him

“...mimicry is a design...” through which the Caribbean people can “Camouflage” their mixture of African and European identities. However, often referred as a mimic man, Walcott’s poems project stylistic similarities with the European Canon. European modernist poets use a lot of references and allusions to enrich the message of the poem as well as to establish emphasize on certain issues. This attribute of the English poetry is also regarded as one of the most important modernist tool. Hence, the forefather of European modernity T.S. Eliot uses a wide range of allusions in his poems. In European Modern poetry tradition plays an important role as tradition is very evident in modern English poems. Eliot himself associates tradition while referring to season, nature and past. Eliot in many of his poems refers to Shakespeare which shows that he valued past and tradition as a literary canon. In his essay “Tradition and Individual Talent” Eliot reveals that every good writer should have a sense of continuity with writers who have come before them<sup>5</sup>. He refers tradition as receptacle and writers should enter into the perpetual flow of literature and through their individual talent they can change or add a new dimension to the flow of literary tradition. As a result, in every poem of Eliot we can find many literary references. In “The Hollow Man” there are references from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* Dante’s “Paradise”, “Inferno” and “Devine Comedy” and Shakespeare’s *Julius Ceaser*.

Also, Eliot follows a firm classical European form and rhyming pattern in most of his poetry. Having greatly influenced by Shakespeare, we notice in his poem “Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock” he uses dramatic monologue as a form. In the poem he uses a lot of rhyming couplets which is also known as the ‘heroic couplets’. Other lines which do not rhyme are mostly free verse and blank verse with iambic

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<sup>5</sup> This is one of the finest essays by Eliot which is often considered as a milestone for propagating the movement of Modernism.

pentameter. Similarly, Walcott in his poem “Ruins of A Great House” uses dramatic monologue as a form. In addition to this he uses a prologue from Brown’s poem *Urn Burial*. Also, in Walcott’s “Ruins of a Great House” we find allusion of William Blake’s “Songs of Innocence” to bid farewell as it is mentioned in the poem that “farewell, green fields’ / ‘Farewell, ye happy groves!’”. Also, He is using John Donne’s poems to express his feelings as it is mentioned in the poem that “My tears burned from the ashen prose of Donne” (CP 312). By implementing the classical tradition set by the pioneer of European modernity T.S Eliot; Walcott shows an increasing interest for the past.

In addition to this we notice that the poetic creativity and imagination of Walcott is often revisionary or representation of a representation. As, Gikandi argues that “Caribbean modernism is highly revisionary” (04) so, through the Caribbean literature the previous European representation of the ‘other’ is revised. He argues that instead of creating a genealogy most modern Caribbean poets portray the angst, displacement of Caribbean individual develops a counter-discourse. Also, He claims that this process rejects the hegemonic European ideas. Similarly, Walcott tries to response to the existing English literary canon due to the lacks of Caribbean culture and literary tradition. Like many of his poem in “The Green light” we notice him echoing Marvell’s “Bermudas”, a poem describing the beauty of the Isle on an ideal voyage. Walcott however reviews the description of the Isle and it’s beauty and focuses more in the life on the Isle. This shows his understanding of tradition and literature. Like Eliot he also believes that no writer can write alone. In literature there should be a stream of writers writing from the past. This literary tradition according to Eliot, is a key to knowledge and inspiration for the writers afterwards. However, as

Walcott does not have an access to his African past, he tries to be a part of English literary canon.

Though Walcott denies the role of history yet he refers to the European history which is not even his own past. Besides his proneness to follow both the European notion of modernity and responding back to the European literary canon is an output of Caribbean angst. Both the lack of past and the unavailability of the African heritage gives birth to this angst. As a result, like every other Caribbean individual Walcott searches for a past, a history and a literary tradition. This desire for allying with the white is described by Franon in his *Black Skin White Mask* book. It both creates an exaggerated affectivity for whites as well as an inferiority neurosis for being black skinned. Under such condition often the black people start to imitate white people. Consequently, in the black peoples mind the impossible desire to associate as well as to become white starts to culminate. This white obsession is described as the 'abandonment neuroses' by Franon.<sup>6</sup> Since, he has made the poem optically white so, Walcott becomes a black skin white mask from Franon's perspective.

Therefore Walcott provides the idea that the Caribbean people from their different cultural traditions and heritage can find the acknowledgement of the glory. In order to unify points through which a connection will be built in a disjuncture and disjoined Caribbean, where poetic imagination is must. In other words, for Walcott, from the ashes of the past a new Caribbean culture can be re-born, as a result Walcott

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<sup>6</sup> Franon in his book *Black Skin White Mask* wonderfully describes the fear desire dichotomy that played around the colonial man and women relationship or the black slave and white master relationship. He talks about the abandonment neurosis in his second chapter. For further information see the bibliography.

regards the brutal and destructive colonial history potentially constructive and empowering in creation of the Caribbean art and literature.

### Chapter 3: Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*: Caribbean Intricacies and Revolution

Brathwaite; a contemporary of Walcott, is a Barbadian poet whose works largely deal with the African roots and the intricate Caribbean heritage. Compared to Walcott whose works assimilate with the English canon, Brathwaite acts as an advocate of rejecting the English writing style and diction. He introduces the concept of "nation language" by breaking standard English in order to express his African experience in the Caribbean. By doing so he made English not just a variety of language but also the language of the slaves and laborers who were brought in the Caribbean. His revolutionary works are famous for exploring the root of the Caribbean soul while rebuilding a cultural connection from the fragmented African past. Despite of having differences in style, message and diction, Brathwaite's trilogy *The Arrivants*<sup>7</sup> largely deals with the theme of Caribbean angst likely Walcott's works. As, "He writes about the themes of Africa, slavery and colonialism, alienations, exile and search for identity of literature and society." (Kehinde 184).<sup>8</sup> However, there is a significant difference in the approach of Brathwaite while projecting the Caribbean modern angst. Unlike Walcott who prefers to linger in the state of anxiety, Brathwaite tries to provide a solution to this angst by going back to the African roots. In this collection of works he recreates the settings and tries to voice out the dark experience of the Caribbean people by projecting a journey through time and space. Kehinda in his

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<sup>7</sup>The *Arrivants* is a single volume of Brathwaite's trilogy – the *Rights of passage*, *Masks and Islands*. The book is first published on 1973. This book highly deals with the intricacies of Caribbean identity. It also explores themes like the lack of history, rootlessness, inbetweenness, displacement and double consciousness. Brathwaite through his art of writing establishes Caribbean aesthetics .

<sup>8</sup> Ayo Kehinde a professor of Department of English, University of Ibadan , Nigeria wrote "Edward Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and The Trope of Cultural Searching", an excellent piece of writing which explores different aspects of Brathwaite's trilogy.

article says that Brathwaite's poetry is an absolutely wonderful attempt of creating, recreating and reconstructing the African values and genius which are found in history. Hence, Brathwaite is essential on creating Afrocentricity; the term as explained by Gilroy (1995). He tries to revive the African heritage, values and bits of folk culture through setting up a cross Atlantic voyage to Africa. Also, we notice that he wants to achieve a collective identity in the Caribbean context through his probes to African roots. At this point of my paper I will show how Brathwaite portrays the Caribbean angst in his work.

The loss of history and memories of culture are elements which are the most ambiguous in the African context yet most widely explored by Brathwaite through which he portrays the angst. His approach towards the loss of history and African heritage is out of the desires of reclaiming the glory of past. Hence, we notice his conscious attempt of going back to the past instead of rejecting it as Walcott has done. In his poem "Masks" we notice the poet giving the readers accounts of the Caribbean past :

Your tree  
 has been split  
 by a white axe  
 of lightening;  
 the wise  
 are di-

vided, the

eyes

of our elders

are dead

And we walk,

hope mock-

ing the path-

way, through the

dead leaves

of elders,

their dark eyes

of strangers di-

vided by pain

as by distance;

their wise

bones composed

into hollow silence; (TA 130)

These lines simultaneously, conveys an African pathos which occurs due to the memories of a lost past and expresses the anger for this loss. In his book *The Arrivants* we notice how he maintains a chain record of history by tracing back historical movements. Especially through accounts of the Middle Passage he tries to reconcile his motherland Caribbean with his home Africa. He chose Africa as home as it is the birthplace of his ancestors while holding the essence as well as aesthetics of the African culture. Africa as a result acts both as a historical and spiritual home for the Caribbean people. Unlike Walcott, he identifies his own hybridity with the history of middle passage. In the book he shows how as a Caribbean individual he celebrates his hybridity and "...viewed the experience of travel not as the burden of dislocation, but as an expression of free will and self-determination." (Manolachi 139).<sup>9</sup> He suggests that the middle passage acted as a tool for cultural transformation. By travelling across the Atlantic an understanding of the African roots will develop and new modes of representation will be discovered. According to him this will eventually lead to a reconstruction of the Caribbean identity. "Brathwaite believes that the 'middle passage' experience is not after all totally a traumatic experience rather, the experience is "a pathway or channel between (African) tradition and what is being evolved on new soil in the Caribbean..." (Kehinde 184 ). As a result, the middle passage is not only understood as brutal past haunting the Caribbean individual like a ghost but also sets connections between the two disconnected worlds.

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<sup>9</sup> Monica Manolachi the writer of the article *The Memory of Different Rhythms and Colours* in E. K. Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* is a faculty member of University of Bucharest. In this article she wonderfully explores the style and rhyming pattern of Brathwaite's work with reference to Brathwaite's famous autobiographical work "Timehri".

Yet, the brutality of the middle passage has a deeper psychic effect on Caribbean identity making process. On one hand is the memory of the traumatic past and on the other hand the memory of being betrayed by African traders bruised the Caribbean consciousness. This lead to a duality in the Caribbean consciousness or self, as well as sets a quest for identity. :

“...for the African enslaved and their descendants in the Caribbean, the impact of these psychic wounds have been so profound that their consciousness has over the centuries been afflicted by the crisis of identity. Indeed, it is this very crisis that basically informs the creative imagination of the average Caribbean artist. All kinds of cleavages along the lines of race, wealth, class and political affiliation have caused the alienation felt by the African people in the Caribbean.”(Kehinde 183)

*The Arrivants* is an attempt of forming an identity through a quest in the African roots. For this purpose he tries to come in terms with the past. As it is written that Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* “... is a quest for identity, an attempt to come to terms with a past that was overwhelming in itself...”( Kehinde 182). The knowledge of the past builds up a consciousness as well as a creative space. Brathwaite in his poetry showed how consciousness afflicted identity crisis and boosts up creative imagination. Most of his poems from the trilogy circle around the struggle against the colonizers' oppression, the sufferings and unpleasant living conditions, class and ethnic differences between British and Caribbean, hostility and rebellion against hegemonic powers all highlighting the tension of cultural identity. Since we understand that “ Brathwaite's main artistic preoccupation is to achieve ‘wholeness’ through poetic reconstruction”(182). As a hybrid identity Brathwaite himself

struggled a lot in search as well as in locating his identity as “...the trilogy signifies a yearning by the poet for identification with his African origin.”(Kehinde 187). In this rummage he spent eight years in Ghana, “Even though Brathwaite lived as an alien in Africa (Ghana) , he henceforth acknowledges his African blood and desires to be identified with it.”( Kehinde 187).

Brathwaite views this identity crisis as a result of rootlessness which, is a feeling of not belonging to the Caribbean landscape. This feeling of rootlessness and having a fragmented culture is the most crucial factor of the lives of the Caribbean. In his poem the “Folkways” we notice how the poet feels empty as a black Caribbean individual.

I am a fuck-  
 in' negro,  
 man, hole  
 in my head,  
 brains in  
 my belly;  
 black skin  
 red eyes  
 broad back  
 big you know  
 what; not very quick  
 to take offence  
 but once  
 offended, watch

that house  
 you livin' in  
 an' watch that lit-  
 tle sister. (TA 30)

However, this emptiness is not only felt by Brathwaite but also felt widely across the Caribbean. Brathwaite does not prefer to linger upon this emptiness as “...one thing they have in common is the need felt by the West Indian writer to recreate and redefine the essence of his/her black color and West Indian experience – the need to capture the reality of the people who seem rootless”. (Kehinde 183). Therefore, we notice Brathwaite tiring to portray the reality of the Caribbean people in many of his poems where he tries to redefine the essence of his blackness.

However, part of the ideological transmission of the British educational system influenced Brathwaite to go to England. Interestingly, Kehinde, in his article explains how he felt rootless in his journey to England whereas felt “...a profound relationship of individual and of the spiritual world to the community”( 184 ) in Ghana. He also defines the Caribbean work of art as “... a literature highlighting the struggles for emancipation and the yearning for a reunion with the roots – “a cultural founts”.( Kehinde 185). Similarly, Brathwaite in his drum poems used drum as a symbol of African culture which is a recurrent element of African reconnections. This is also done by allusion to African musical instrument and rhythms. In his poem “Caliban” he shows how allusion to African dance and rhythms both works to evokes the experience of the Caribbean diaspora as well as a symbol of black creative inspiration.

For Brathwaite diction and styling of poetry is very important as these two are essential in creating Caribbean essence as well as aesthetics. As, the slaves of the Atlantic used Creole language, since then the fragmented English has become the language of the people of the Atlantic belt. As a poet Brathwaite intends to use a form of language and rhyming style which can carry the weight of past. “To create Caribbean aesthetics modulation of tones and of the voice which is at once private and public. The more formal inheritance from African poetry includes his adaptation of the praise poetry, the lament, the dirge, incantatory verse, the curse and the abuse.” (Kehinde 191). With this different diction and styling of poetry not only does he illustrate the Caribbean tension of language but also rebels against the European language structure and patterns. This sense of resistance and deliberate rejection of the European form as well as style of writing is the result of his angst. It also shows the conscious of the Caribbean to not to have a full command of language. As the Caribbean language is like a dialect it puts the Caribbean people in a state of mind that they are uncivilized and not pure. By breaking English not only he helps evoking the Caribbean essence and aesthetics but also we notice an emergence of Caribbean modernity. “The extensive use of radical enjambment and caesuras is a recurrent and very productive fashion in Caribbean poetry, aimed at what has been called “breaking English” as opposed to “broken English”” ( Manolachi 137). Through the resistance against the colonizers language Brathwaite wants to create a new English. However, this reminds us of Achebe who talks about using the colonizers language in order to subvert it and to make a new English.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The unavailability of an absolute pre-colonial past as well as the lack of an access to the ancestral African language hinders the way of protesting against the colonial culture through culture. However, this lead to a language debate in the West Indies colonial regimes where colonial language of English, French, Portuguese etc has been imposed. Hence critics like Chinua Achebe in “The African Writer

He uses the power of sound to express the complex state of mind of the people of the Caribbean. The feeling of rootlessness, lack of past and the duality in the mere process of building identity all could only be well explained through the breaking of English. Brathwaite in addition to this uses his excellent skill of word playing. Often he breaks well-chosen words by laying stress as well as uses anaphora and rhyming verse to produce “both visual and aural impressions” (137) . In his poem “Caliban” we can find a profound example of word play:

And

Ban

Ban

Cal-

iban

like to play

pan

at the Car-

nival;

pran-

---

and *The English Language*” argues that English is the only language which can explain the colonial experience but it has to carry the weight of past. In order to do so he suggests that African writers should break English and form a new English to resist against the colonial culture.

cing up to the lim-

bo silence

down

down

down

so the God won't drown (TA 192)

This radical style is also found in his poem "Rites" :

An' pointin' he finger at Wardle,

He jump up an' down

Like a sun-shatter daisy an' bawl

Out: "B...L...O...O...D, B...I...G B...O...y

Bring me he B.. L..O...O...D'

Who would'a think that for twenty- (TA 201)

By using such radical fashion of writing Brathwaite shows the gap between the European culture and the Caribbean culture. This deliberate rejection of English literary tradition also highlights the modern angst as we know that the modern angst results into a breaking away from tradition and structures. "It visually alters the heroic couplet, a common rhyme scheme found in Geoffrey Chaucer, John Dryden or

Alexander Pope. Phonetically, the arrangement in short lines induces a more eloquent reading, marked by suggestive pauses. Concerned with the gap between English poetic styles and the material reality of the Caribbean, Brathwaite (1984) famously proposed a radical perspective:..” (Manolachi 137). He also deliberately uses his anxiety to trigger his creative imagination. Thus through his poetry the Caribbean experience is well expressed. He considers language as a creative act itself and the emergence of a new English is essential. Like Achebe Brathwaite believes that a new English can express the historical transformation of the Caribbean. Hence, “He found it essential that the emergence of a new English can be the expression of historical transformation and can link the language of former slaves with the language of the contemporary.” ( Manolachi 143).

However, at this point of my paper I will like to critically look at Brathwaite’s treatment of the state of ‘in betweenness’. The Caribbean modernity is always in a state of emergence. It is neither complete nor is it incomplete. (Gikandi 20). The complex state of the Caribbean individuals due to its disturbing past is very much echoed in the Caribbean creative space. However, Gikandi suggests that the Caribbean writers have the privilege of creating their own past through their power of imagination. As, they have no burden or regrets from the past, they can start a fresh. Besides, they can evoke a great African pathos from exile in the Caribbean (35). Interestingly, we notice Brathwaite negates this creative space. On one hand, we notice him putting a lot of emphasis on going back to the African roots. This attribute of Brathwaite’s poetry both hinders the pathways of a revolution in Caribbean modernity as well as shrinks down the creative imagination. On the other hand, Walcott in most of his poetry

discusses the beauty of Caribbean landscape as well as evokes a deep African pathos. Walcott in his works evokes the African pathos successfully as he writes from exile.

However, unlike Walcott, Brathwaite proposes a possible solution to the existing complications that Caribbean individual has to face. According to him the only way to reconcile with the two existing cultures is to go back to the Africa. Only by gaining knowledge about African heritage, folk culture and dance can put an end to the difficulties of Caribbean identities. As a result we notice that for Brathwaite travel becomes a very important. As, travelling to the Africa helps understanding the African reality and past. By doing so the Caribbean people will be able to fill up the cultural gap between the Caribbean and the English society.

## Conclusion

In attempting to trace the projection of the Caribbean angst as portrayed by Derek Walcott and Edward Kamau Brathwaite I have attempted to take a look at the historical background of the Atlantic beginning from the colonial period. The history of the slavery in the Caribbean substantiates an obvious speculation of the presence of identity crisis, displacement and double consciousness in making of the Caribbean self. Being hybrid identity both of them demonstrated these intricacies of the Caribbean individuals in a divergent way.

The Caribbean consciousness of the discontinuity of the past has led to a yearning as well as rejection of the memories of past. I have tried to illustrate how both Walcott and Brathwaite dealt with this bitterness about their past. Though they are a part of the Eurocentric culture yet, they set up a sense of resistance against the leprosy of colonial power. Walcott in one hand re-represents the Caribbean soul on the other hand Brathwaite breaks the English literary tradition through his radical fashion.

By upholding the rise of a fragmented society they omit the cultural gap as well as connect the disjoint Caribbean identity. While both Walcott and Brathwaite establish the Caribbean aesthetics and essence through poetry, they also usher exciting prospects for West India modernity.

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