

# Caribbean poetry

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Caribbean Voices : Living a Double life / Dual Identities. Caribbean Poetry is the expression of the constant dualistic nature of the Caribbean identity. Caribbean Poetry exemplifies a unique hybrid made from the voice of the Caribbean experience and its postcolonial English heritage but this creates an inner crisis. The inner crisis of two conflicting cultures that create further conflicting ideas of home and belonging on one hand and growth and fulfilment on the other. But it is also about the resolving of these inner issues. A life in limbo. Searching for identity in Limbo.

The Caribbean Voice is spoken through the Poetry of the Caribbean islands. The answer to the identity crisis can be found amongst the poetry. It's hybridity, uniqueness and resilience are all characteristics of the poetry and therefore the poet. What does the poetry reveal about the problems of post colonial identity, including the relationships between personal identity and cultural identity and such issues as double consciousness and hybridity. Looking at the difficulties inherent in the postcolonial subject's attempt to formulate a new personal and national identity.

Social and cultural oppression are the effects of colonialism. The aftermath, language and culture. Hybridization and double consciousness are the effects of colonization. Homelessness and exile. Living in a state of limbo. Caught between two cultures. Introduction: Living in Limbo The poetry not only addresses the issues of the Caribbean people but over time has developed into something much more. It has become philosophical and wise and this is down to its cultural experiences. The Caribbean offers us literature about the process of growth through, or in spite of, a history of exploitation and prejudice, about the turning of negatives into positives.. ' (Burnett, 1986,

Pg23) Chapter one: Home, Hybridity and Diasporic Existence – look at what the poetry tells us about the writers sense of home, national identity, cultural identity. The social and cultural oppression they faced. Chapter two: The power of Language – what does the language in the poem tell us about the identity of the poet, liberating or oppressive, close reading of the poetry.

Chapter three: The future of the post colonial subject/ the aftermath of colonialism – is the identity of postcolonial subject destined to be uncertain, identity being cultural or personal? Double consciousness exile and homelessness . Taking of different cultural influences and making them whole. Poetry is a way of breaking through/ deconstructing the colonization and forming new senses of identity that is a combination of all the cultures. Taking the bits you prefer or the best bits and forming something much better out of it. Way to combat is to embrace the differences and create new forms of identity.

Introduction Poetry from the Caribbean Islands has evolved remarkably. It has now developed an identity of its own despite emerging through the forced combining of different cultures. This new identity is belonging to the poets of the islands and this identity is resilient and clearly uniquely Caribbean. Through colonial education writers were able to take the Great Tradition of European poets and give them a new identity by changing the subject matter of the poems and experimenting with rhythms and poetic languages stemmed from the African heritage these writers uniquely possess.

It becomes a magical combination of poetic prose and oral tradition that the writers use to share with the reader the experiences and realities of the

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Caribbean existence. What results is poetry that is able to communicate to masses of people, from different cultures, in a form so well placed that it becomes both simple and profound. The poetry not only addresses the issues of the Caribbean people but over time has developed into something much more. It has become philosophical and wise and this is down to its cultural experiences. The Caribbean offers us literature about the process of growth through, or in spite of, a history of exploitation and prejudice, about the turning of negatives into positives.. ' (Burnett, 1986, Pg23) The poetry of these writers has a way of shedding the old skin of western thinking and emerging with a new self awareness, that comes with a new form of self expression. Caribbean poets portray via their poetry, the personal struggles they experience, of yearning to be home whilst fearing rejection and seeking their own national and cultural identity through their own displacement.

Chapter Two: Language and Technique within Caribbean Poetry: ' Not Just a Pretty Verse' Walcott's poetry is of a high literary quality, is the success of his poetry not an example of the oppressor still containing the power of approval. Walcott represents the colonial subject adopting the style of the colonizer and his remarkable talent becomes impossible to ignore. Brathwaite's poetry rebels against Standard English and literary traditions and draws from his African heritage to express himself in a unique form, so that it cannot be compared or approved of by English traditions.

Where Walcott adopts and accepts the example set by the European colonizers, Brathwaite is determined to set a new example. There is evidence of a dual identity within Caribbean poetry and it is this dual identity that supplies the poetry its richness and depth that make it uniquely Caribbean

thus making it successful in terms of literary value and technique in its own right. This is evidently apparent in the works of Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite. Both poets utilise their colonial heritage in different ways.

Walcott embraces the duality with some apprehension, but always remains graceful and loyal to his art form's indignity, he writes with dignity and recognition. Brathwaite however is the more accessible poet of the two in terms of his focus in all things historical and social. Brathwaite is concerned with the dilemmas of the Caribbean experience. However in spite of their differences, when viewed complimentary to each other, as opposed to compared and critiqued on their differences alone, the works of these two poets amalgamate and create a unique Caribbean voice.

A voice that expresses the beauty in this new art form, a new mode of poetic expression and poetic language whilst dealing with the problems of a dual identity. The advantage of the colonial subject's cultural hybridity would arguably be the development of language. A Caribbean writer is not only able to use Standard English to express his art but can as easily slip into the local vernacular of his native home. This invaluable skill of a multiple form of expression creates a very distinctive style and a unique elegance to the poetry.

The Caribbean writer inherits the English language, which itself is a hybrid, not forgetting the Spanish or the French-based 'patois', and together these European languages are combined and rewritten by the Caribbean poets. This gives the writers of the Caribbean a chance to develop and adapt language even further and create a new form and create a brand new poetic language which results in a unique richness that can only come from the

Caribbean. Caribbean poetry can often be categorised and placed into neat sections.

By sectioning off the poems in terms of their style is to ignore the importance of the embracing of their hybridity. To fully appreciate the work of the poets is to ignore the neat piles they have been placed into and listen to the voice of the poet, on an individual poem basis. To discuss the language within Caribbean poetry and the expression of Caribbean poetry it is impossible to ignore the term ‘oral tradition’. The use of this term, or more particularly the debates surrounding its literary value, is a frequently discussed topic in the study of Caribbean poetry. It is only since the 1970s that the term ‘oral tradition’ began to be consistently used in connection with the certain developments in West Indian poetry. ’ (Brown, Morris, Rohlehr, 1989, Pg1) There has always been an issue of the viability of this poetry and this leads to debates with regards to class and power. Societies have not always relied on the written to preserve their history and therefore the importance of oral tradition is crucial when trying to grasp any kind of understanding of the culture and heritage of the Caribbean.

For the purpose of this essay the term ‘oral tradition’ will be used in conjunction with the words vernacular and dialect, to describe the native dialect of the poets, as and when they choose to use these forms of expression. It is the hybridity of these forms combined with the literary traditions that they are so often compared to, that will be the focus of this essay, and the benefit of its hybrid nature, not the political factors that are involved in its validity as an expression of poetry. Focussing on the hybridity of poetic form for now, the poet that excels in this manner is Claude Mckay.

McKay's poem's formal style shows a clear influence of the traditional English verse, the style of the sonnet. McKay's appreciation of literary quality is obvious. The rewriting of the sonnet to express the heartbreak of prejudice is arresting and completely enraptures its audience, ' McKay pours old wine – brilliantly – into new bottles. ' (Denize, Newlin, 2009, Pg100) What is remarkable about McKay is how he uses the famous verse established by his oppressors to express and communicate the sorrow of prejudice.

McKay appreciates the art of poetry in a traditional literary sense yet he uses it to express the realities and emotions of subjects that are personal to him, issues of race and oppression. What is also unique about McKays sonnets is that anger and frustration runs through the poems, parallel with dignity and bravery. This combination of emotions is powerful and inspiring. The combination is achieved through a mixture of technique and chosen language.

In ' The White House' the first two lines use the cacophonous sounds of the consonants ' t' and ' s' to portray a frustration and annoyance with the situation. ' Your door is shut against my tightened face, And I am sharp as steel discontent;' The cacophony effect replicates a tut sound. The next two lines however are less aggressive in tone as McKay describes his dignity despite his frustration, ' But I possess the courage and the grace To bear my anger, proudly and unbent. ' Traditional and vernacular style of Louise Bennett. Her authentic Caribbean voice, storyteller.

Humour and satire within the poetry of Louise Bennett. Brathwaite revolutionary style, experimented with rhyming patterns and shapes. It appears incomplete and as though the form has not been established, but <https://assignbuster.com/caribbean-poetry/>

the poetry possesses an authority that demands the attention of the reader. Caribbean poetry written in the English language should only serve to strengthen a sense of identity by proving that Caribbean ideas can survive translation. There is an undeniable strength and tenacity evident in Caribbean poetry. Chapter Three : What the future holds... the aftermath

Linton Kwesi Johnson, younger in Jamaican heritage, Johnson would become more accessible to the Black British youth. Use of music to express his poetry. Evolved from Brathwaite's rhythmic style. 'to think of the world you might inherit, less in terms of the size of the estate than in the level of pollution that hangs over it' (Markham, 1989, Pg19) A formally colonized nation can use language as an aid to progression on the path to reclaiming and recreating its own identity. Poetry is a means of negotiating the conflicting cultures to achieve a positive sense of identity.

Colonial education should be used as a means by which to strengthen not demean your cultural heritage; a means to forge a new identity of your own. The Sonnet Tradition and Claude McKay Donna E. M. Denize and Louisa Newlin The English Journal , Vol. 99, No. 1 (Sep. , 2009), pp. 99-105 Published by: National Council of Teachers of English Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503338> Morris, Mervyn, Disappointed Guests: Essays by African, Asian and west Indian Students, ed H. Tajfel and J. L. Dawson, Oxford Uni. Press, 1965, Pg5-26.