

# West indian literature

Literature



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of the of the Concerned 12 June 2009 West Indian Literature This is a comparative analysis of the two poems written by Eric Roach, which are ‘ Caribbean Coronation Verse’ and ‘ For the Peasant People of the Islands’. These two poems are complementary to each other in the sense that they present two sides of the same coin. While the ‘ Caribbean Coronation Verse’ is an ironical tirade against the colonial atrocities and plunder, ‘ For the Peasant People of the Islands’ gives expression to the validity of this vehement protest, by elaborating on the plight of the oppressed masses that had to bear the brunt of colonialism for generations.

‘ Caribbean Coronation Verse’ is a political poem. Through them medium of this verse, the poet intends to bluntly express his aversion for the British Imperialism. The poem begins with an allusion to Shakespeare and Marlowe, the two names that are symbolic of the literary and cultural refinement of the British colonialism. However, this allusion to the British suaveness is typically questioned by what the poet continues to say in the proceeding stanzas. In the following stanzas, Roach unravels the pathetic and cruel history of the British colonialism, which was secured with the active help and aid of ruthless and unscrupulous pirates and privateers (Jennings 2005). In the third stanza, Roach specifically mentions the name of John Hawkins, who happened to be an infamous British slave trader, and who was involved in the buying and selling of the slaves to the Spanish for pecuniary gains (Jennings 2005).

In the stanza five, Roach comments on the colonial tempering with the subaltern history. Here Roach also elaborately deals with the dubious nature of the English language, which the slaves inherited from their British oppressors (Jennings 2005). The irony of the matter is that this so-called

literacy, instead of being a medium for the popular emancipation, becomes the very tool that was used by the imperial forces to strengthen their grip over their ill-gotten empire (Jennings 2005). Hence, the call “ Advance Brittainia (44)” though seemingly being a validation of the British colonialism is in fact a tacit and ironical condemnation of the unjust and merciless aspects of the British colonialism (Jennings 2005).

In ‘ For the Peasant People of the Islands’ Roach carries on the theme of colonial loot and plunder by referring to the “ ancestral rape (1)” in the very first line. The poem refers to the methodical and deliberate subjugation of the masses by the colonial forces by pointing to the “ breaking of our breed (3)”. Though the poem on the surface seems to be the natives’ rejection to ones oppressed lot and destiny, the fact is that this verse gives expression to the resilient and unremitting nature of the struggle against the oppressive imperialism (Thieme 2000) . The poem ends with a message of hope in the sense that it refers to the passing on of the natives’ struggle to the future generations, thereby leaving the readers with something to look forward to and aspire for.

“ But where they go they take them,  
Theirs for ever more.”

## References

Jennings, Lisa Gay. “ Renaissance Model for Caribbean Poets: Identity, Authenticity and the Early Modern Lyric Revisited” . A thesis submitted to the Department of English for MA, The Florida State University College for Arts and Science, 2005.

Thieme, John. Post-Colonial Literatures. London: Arnold, 2000.

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