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ABSTRACT

Drawing inspiration from the dialectic theory of literature; a theory that emphasizes the relationship between content and form in literature, this paper concentrates on the dramatic style of Derek Walcott, Bate Besong, John Nkemngong Nkengasong and Tawfik Al-Hakim vis a vis the canonical dramatic aesthetics prescribed by Aristotle. From a Marxist and New Historicist view of textual analysis, it portrays the importance of aesthetics in revealing the playwright's ideological and aesthetic visions. The analyses in this paper conclude that though Western art forms and absurdist tendencies have in one way or the other influenced the aesthetic vision of postcolonial dramatists, their plays display a high level of individual creativity and dramatic experimentation as they adopt novel and non-conventional dramatic formulae to convey their messages. Thus, readers and critics prone to canonical (traditional) theatrical formulas will need extra efforts to be able to savour the different levels of meanings in the plays under study as portrayed by their aesthetics. The playwrights' dramatic style therefore create an alternative tradition which presents drama as formless, a social force and an ideological weapon.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Derek Walcott, Bate Besong, John Nkemngong Nkengasong and Tawfik Al-Hakim are playwrights who strongly believe that a work of arts must communicate with a particular audience

and in a particular way. These playwrights have been very concern with not only what they write about but the manner in which their ideologies are transmitted to the public. Though there is enough evidence to prove that the plays of the above playwrights have been influenced to some extent by absurdist writers like Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Harold Pinter, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Brendan Behan, Arthur Adamov and Fernando Arrabal amongst others, the playwrights nevertheless, are more pre-occupied with what they have to say than with how they say it. Reason why they is a sustained and indiscriminate use of experimental, novel and non-conventional dramatic techniques. To these playwrights therefore, deconstructing, confronting and nullifying classical dramatic prescriptions in their plays become part of the process of emancipating Postcolonial arts from Western influences.

“Deconstruction” is considered in this paper from the perspective of *The Bedford Glossary of Literary and Critical Terms* which defines it as:

A philosophical and critical movement, starting in the 1960s and especially applied to the study of literature, that questions all traditional assumptions about the ability of language to represent reality and emphasizes that a text has no stable reference or identification because words essentially only refer to other words and therefore a reader must approach a text by eliminating any metaphysical or ethnocentric assumptions through an active role of defining meaning, sometimes by a reliance on new word construction, etymology, puns, and other word play. (224).

Deconstruction therefore will simply mean the attempts made to break down or discontinue a particular rule, principle, tradition or formula. For a relatively long period of time, Aristotle's prescriptions defined and influenced the writing of tragedies as there were considered as the unique formulae to be used in the writing and interpretation of drama. These poetics became a measuring rod for any successful tragedy. Most postcolonial writers therefore considered such an imposition as an extension of the colonial process of domination. As such, and in an attempt to break away from the West, writers started inventing their own writing formulas with the objective of emancipating postcolonial literature from the chains imposed on it by the West. Derek Walcott, Bate Besong, John Nkemngong Nkengasong and Tawfik Al -Hakim are playwrights who strongly oppose the concepts of dramatic universality and canons as propagated by the West.

The word "aesthetics" etymologically comes from two Greek words: "aisthatikos" and aishamesthai" which means "perception" and "to feel" or "to perceive" respectively (qtd in Zumbushi, 2008, 81). In its simplest definition therefore, aesthetics will mean the perception, sense impression, and the ability to feel sensation for the good, the beautiful, and the sublime in art. Similarly, the *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the Twentieth Century* considers the aesthetics of literature to be intrinsically preoccupied with "Poetic essence and the extent to which that essence yields a vision of life which may be called beauty" (227). This definition shows that aesthetics in literature is related to beauty and the effects it has on the author's vision and ideas. It is in this light that Bernard Fonlon in *The Genuine Intellectuals* states that "literature, whether it be the lyric, the epic, the fable or tale-play is one expression of the beautiful. Beauty is not conferred on a work by chance; it is the result of conscious specific causes at work" (90).

A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory defines a "canon" as "a body of rules, principles, or standards accepted as axiomatic and universally binding in a field of study or art"

(234). A literary canon will simply refer to those rules or principles that serve as a measuring rod or a yardstick for the conception and interpretation of literature. Most of Western literature was governed by canons and the Bible remains the most canonical texts in human history.

II. CLASSICAL DRAMA AND THE "GOSPEL" ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE

Dorseh S.T in *Classical Literary Criticism: Aristotle, Horace and Longinus* attempts a perfect analysis of what is today generally termed as Aristotle's poetics. This section of this paper summarizes what the principal tenets of his poetics are. Dorseh opines that Aristotle's poetics seeks to address the different kinds of poetry, the structure of a good poem and the division of a poem into its component parts. He defines poetry as a 'medium of imitation' that seeks to represent or duplicate life through character, emotion, or action. Aristotle defines poetry very broadly, including epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and even some kinds of music.

According to Dorseh, a tragedy in Aristotle's terms is defined as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude," written in "language embellished," presented as action rather than as narrative, and which "through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions." (24). Because tragedy is an imitation of action, and because the emotionally powerful reversal and recognition scenes are part of the plot, Aristotle assigns this the "first principle" of tragedy. After plot, in order of importance, Aristotle prioritizes the remaining elements of tragedy as follows: Character, Thought (the motivation and/or likelihood of an action), Diction, Song and Spectacle. Aristotle lays out six elements of tragedy: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. Plot is 'the soul' of tragedy, because action is paramount to the significance of a drama and all other elements are subsidiary.

In terms of plot, Aristotle posits that a plot must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It must also be universal in significance, have a determinate structure, and maintain a unity of theme and purpose. Plot also must contain elements of astonishment, reversal (peripeteia), recognition and suffering. Reversal is an ironic twist or change by which the main action of the story comes full-circle. Recognition, meanwhile, is the change from ignorance to knowledge, usually involving people coming to understand one another's true identities. Suffering is a destructive or painful action, which is often the result of a reversal or recognition. All three elements coalesce to create "catharsis," which is the engenderment of fear and pity in the audience: pity for the tragic hero's plight and fear that his fate might befall us.

Furthermore, in terms of characterization as stipulated by Aristotle, a poet should aim for four things. First, the hero must be 'good,' and thus manifest moral purpose in his speech. Second, the hero must have propriety, or 'manly valor.' Thirdly, the hero must be 'true to life and finally, the hero must be consistent. The tragic hero must be an individual of high personality whose actions attract public attention. His downfall must come as a result of his own tragic flaw. Classical dramas had Dukes, Kings, Knights, Princes and Princesses, Emperors and Empresses amongst other high personalities as their main protagonists.

Moreover, as far as structure and time management are concern, Aristotle proposes that a good tragedy should live and die within twenty four hours. The action of the play should not exceed a day and the play should be structured in four parts; the introduction, rising action, climax and denouement with each playing a specific role in the plot development. The introduction will introduce the play and the conflict, the climax is the apex of the conflict while the denouement or conclusion is where tangled situations begin to untangle themselves therefore leading to the revelation of certain truths.

Morestill, Aristotle also lays out the elements of successful imitation. The poet must imitate either thing as they are, things as they are thought to be, or things as they ought to be. The poet must also imitate in action and language (preferably metaphors or contemporary words). Errors come when the poet imitates incorrectly - and thus destroys the essence of the poem - or when the poet accidentally makes an error (a factual error, for instance). Aristotle does not believe that factual errors sabotage the entire work; errors that limit or compromise the unity of a given work, however, are much more consequential.

Aristotle concludes by tackling the question of whether the epic or tragic form is 'higher.' Most critics of his time argued that tragedy was for an inferior audience that required the gesture of performers, while epic poetry was for a 'cultivated audience' which could filter a narrative form through their own imaginations. In reply, Aristotle notes that epic recitation can be marred by overdone gesticulation in the same way as a tragedy. Moreover, tragedy, like poetry, can produce its effect without action - its power is in the mere reading. Aristotle argues that tragedy is, in fact, superior to epic, because it has all the epic elements as well as spectacle and music to provide an indulgent pleasure for the audience. Tragedy then, despite the arguments of other critics, is the higher art for Aristotle.

III. POSTCOLONIAL DRAMATISTS AND THE EUPHORIA FOR NEW DRAMATIC FORMULAS

In recent times, Postcolonial dramatists have revealed an overt political commitment that has been described as revolutionary in their clear and growing tendency away from the conventional notions enshrined in the bulk of postcolonial writings by the West. Their revolutionary tendencies in terms of content, is noticeable in their opposition to imperialism, concern for the masses and their emphasis on socialism. Their socialist leanings and convictions separate them from the older generation of writers, who qualify them as "leftist". Aesthetically, their revolutionary tendencies are revealed in their innovative styles of writings and their excessive experimentation

with dramatic conventions. As revolutionary playwrights, Walcott, Besong, Nkengasong and Al-Hakim almost completely in their thematic pre-occupations, plot, characterization and structure violate the classical tenet of playwriting as they embark in a series of aesthetic experimentations. Their style qualifies them as playwrights who set out “to disorder our expectation of coherence” (Reuben, 1994, 7). Throughout their plays, though inspired at some points by Western dramatic tenets, there is a conscious attempt to confront, nullify and deconstruct classical tenets as the playwrights embark on a series of aesthetic experimentations.

Their aesthetic vision creates an alternative tradition, which presents literature as a social force and an ideological weapon. Commenting on the aesthetics of *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, (Henceforth referred to as *Requiem*) George Nyamndi states that “The universe of *Requiem* is formless. The play knows neither neatness nor order. It does not adhere to the classical pattern of acts and scenes. Instead, it is a free mélange of fragments of scenes, initiations, flashbacks and movements” (36). Though made with reference to *Requiem*, the above comments can with little or no modification, apply to the plays by Walcott, Nkengasong and Al-Hakim. Even though the plays of these playwrights have a precise historical and geographical setting, the geographical settings are divided into multiple set scenes. Walcott’s, Besong’s, Nkengasong’s and Al-Hakim’s experimentation with aesthetics in the following plays: *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (Henceforth *Dream*, *The Sea at Dauphin* (Henceforth *The Sea*), *Pantomime*, *The Most Cruel Death of the Talkative Zombie* (Henceforth *Zombie*), *Requiem for the Last Kaiser* (Henceforth *Requiem*), *Beasts of No Nations* (Henceforth *Beasts*), *The Banquet*, *Once Upon Four Lepers* (Henceforth *Lepers*), *Change Waka and His Man Sawa Boy* (Henceforth *Change Waka*), *Black Caps and Red Feathers* (Henceforth *Black Caps*) and *Fate of A Cockroach*. At the level of their plots, some of these plays do not have any chronological plot. One can hardly narrate the stories from the beginning to the end. The plays are written in tableaux and fragments with no

cause and effect sequence as practiced by classical playwrights.

Bate Besong’s *Zombie*, *Requiem*, *Beasts*, *Change Waka*, *The Banquet* and *Lepers* know no plot chronology. *Zombie*, the very first play published by Besong is the play in which Besong begins his career as an experimental playwright. It is principally a two man show with no plot chronology. There is no precise stated message and meaning is perceived only in terms of putting together the disjointed dialogues, speeches, songs and comments that run through the entire play. *Zombie* begins with a kind of prologue which, unlike the traditional prologues, is not expository at all. There is a heated debate between Badjidka and Toura and the prologue ends with a song entitled “The Lepers Anthem”. From the beginning right up to the end of the play, there is no sustain conflict as events are perceived only through contemplative interrogations, declarations and statements. Besong himself warns any reader from expecting any traditional formulae when he sub-titles the play “a Fairy tale in three Parts with Revelry at a Requiem”. A fairy tale has no precise narrative pattern and as such, *Zombie* should not be expected to have one.

Change Waka is another play in which Besong demonstrates his experimentation with plot. In the play like the others, there is a complete absence of any plot chronology or cause and effect sequence. The nature of the dialogue in *Change Waka* is very reminiscent of what obtains in Nkengasong’s *Black Caps and Red Feathers*, Soyinka’s *Madmen and Specialist*, *The Road* and *The Strong Breed*. Even when Besong divides his play into parts as noticed in *Change Waka*, there seem to be no logical relationship between the two parts as the play consists of a series of ranting which very much resemble those of a mad man. At some point, it is almost impossible for a reader to make any precise meaning out of such rantings in terms of cause and effect.

In almost the same mannerism, the plot of *Requiem* knows no plot chronology. The plot of *Requiem* for example opens with the portrait of Akhikrikiki as a true dictator. A coffin opens and reveals his “cadaverous face” (1). The action

moves to fragments of a scene where action is between Student and Women. From the first fragment, action moves to the second fragment where there is a heated debate between Antangana and Woman. Thereafter, there is a flashback before the fragment of the next movement and action suddenly moves to Akhikrikikii's marble palace which constitutes the first movement through the second to the end.

Furthermore, in *Beasts*, Besong resorts to a theatrical convention that is essentially different from the realistic stage familiar to many readers. He adopts unorthodox dramatic techniques that often baffled audiences and readers familiar only to realistic theatre. His dramatic experiments and innovations become very complex. As *Requiem*, *Beasts* is written in tableaux. Ambanasom S. A, in *Education of the Deprived* summarizes Besong's aesthetic ideology in the following words:

Besong is a self-conscious writer determined to break with the past. A militant playwright with an obvious innovatory dramatic technique, he is continually experimenting and searching for new techniques of expression. In his theatre there is the general absence of those conventional sign posts that, from practice and tradition, we have come to consider the very hallmarks of traditional drama. His plays do not contain a well-told story, nor a well-conceived chronological plot, there are neither well-depicted characters nor fully developed themes. His plots are akin to Samuel Beckett's, underscoring the inanity of human existence. He provides us with an admixture of the realistic, the historical, the tragic, and the comic, all of this underlying a particular political ideology. He makes for difficult reading because of his abstruse style and rather adventurous use of dramatic techniques, but this is exactly what makes him compulsive as we strive to discover his "style de guerre." (95)

Beasts begin with the parabosis with action concentrated on Narrator. Action later moves to a section entitled "Beasts of No Nation" and action

here is focused on Aadingingin, Cripple, Blind Man, and the Chorus. There is a swift shift to another fragment entitled "Aadinginin and the Night-Soil Men. Focus here is on the Night-Soil-Men and their plights. There is once again, a swift change in scene and action to Aadingingin's marble palace where the play ends. It will be relatively easy to say that *Requiem* and *Beasts* each narrates the story of the insensibility, ineptitude, corrupt, dictatorial and treacherous nature of post-independent leadership, symbolized by Akhikrikikii and Aadingingin, but the stories are told with a series of digressions, allusions, flashbacks and multiple set scenes which distort any notion of plot unity and development. Also, as Ambanasom has suggested, the facts in these plays are not recounted in any chronological order, but rather emerge out of wide-ranging, and sometimes, disjointed dialogues, speeches, songs, and stage comments.

The plots of the plays mention above are not very different to what obtains in Nkengasong's *Black Caps and Red Feathers*. The play is a two act play with no chronological plot as it simply narrates the experiences of its two principal characters Creature and Lunatic. The play opens with Creature as a sole actor and his declarations are reminiscent of that of a madman. One perceives meaning from his lyrical poetic statements which in a typical absurdist manner, are not logically presented. To read and understand Nkengasong's play therefore, meaning can easily be perceived only through the numerous metaphors and symbolisms which run through the play. It is worth mentioning that Nkengasong's career as a poet and the poetic and condensed nature of his play are certainly an influenced of his poetic background. Commenting on the dramatic style of Nkengasong's *Black Caps and Red Feathers*, Ambanasom has this to say:

*Since Nkengasong's work can be placed within the new dramatic conventions, one will discover in *Black Caps* that it is different from what one would normally expect from a traditional play. Therefore, to make sense of this play, the standards used in evaluating it*

should not be criteria pertinent to traditional drama, but rather those belonging to theatre of the absurd, (ibid, 131)

The play therefore in terms of plot completely violates conventional and classical playwriting techniques as there is nothing resembling what one will call a plot because there is no sequence of events that link up to the story. Ambanasom's advice therefore is for any reader of the play is to consider the play within the armpit of theatre of the absurd.

Fate of the Cockroach is one play in which Tawfik Al -Hakim distinguishes himself as an experimental playwright. The play allegorical narrates two parallel stories: one consisting of a King and Queen Cockroach and the other, consisting of a human couple Samia and Adil who work up and began to have an argument on gender roles. In both stories though the topics of arguments are different, the female characters have the upper hand. The discourse in both stories alludes to the conflictive roles between the sexes which could be taken to symbolize the roles of women and men in the Egyptian society. In terms of plot, the story has no plot chronology and meaning can be perceived only by mentally putting the different shades of meanings together.

In almost the same vein as Besong, Nkengasong and Al Hkim, Walcott in *Dream, The Sea, Malcochon* and *Pantomime* violates the classical notions of cause and effect plot sequence. The plot in *Dream* is illogical and fragmented. It does not follow the law of causality and the Aristotelian rule about the beginning, the middle and an end. The story is an incoherent dream by Makak and all the other actions are perceived through this dream. Since the play is presented through a dream framework, its irrational and contradictory elements are accounted for. Walcott through this dreamlike plot exposes the passive nature of the masses who, for the most part are blacks. These people are looked upon as good for nothing and their actions considered as mad. The effort of these people to develop escapist tendencies whether mental or physical is the major cause of disorder in the St. Lucian world. Through the

fragmented plot, Walcott expresses man's inability to create an ideal world to live in. Instead, man is pruned to wickedness and considered a sadist, who celebrates the pains of others.

Similarly, as in *Dream, The Sea at Dauphin* knows no plot chronology. The action in the play takes place within the span of one day with six characters excluding the Chorus of Dauphin Women. This makes for a certain condensation of effects by creating a singularly oppressive and closed atmosphere in which the dilemmas of the communities can be explored through the lives and actions of a few characters. The impression created is that of a few people trapped in a cycle of futility but engaged in a heroic struggle against the elements and centers of power to which the story of *The Sea* is presented. The manner in which the story of *The Sea* is presented demonstrates a complete absence of any logicity in the plot.

Malcochon and *Pantomime* are very similar in terms of plot and structure. These two plays are all one act plays with dialogues that run continuously from the beginning to the end. In both plays, there is intense concentration on a single action with a ruthless pruning of all extraneous material that does not enhance the plays movement. As Besong, Nkengasong and Al-Hakim, Walcott displays in all his plays, his poetic background noticeable in the condense manner in which he writes. It becomes difficult to deduce meaning in Walcott's plays in terms of cause and effect because of the absence of overt and chronological dialogue. His plays are mostly characterized by disjointed dialogue, narrative, mime and pantomime as noticed in *Pantomime*. The disorderly oppressive, exploitation and tyrannical nature of the societies portrayed in the plays of Walcott, Besong and Nkengasong and their poetic backgrounds partly justifies the fragmented and illogical nature of the plots of their stories. The plots thus become a true reflection of society and a revolutionary tendency.

Furthermore, in all the plays under study, there is the violation of the classical notion of structure. As we stated earlier, classical literature has it that

a play should be structured in four stages. That is, the introduction, rising action, climax and denouement. The introduction or exposition introduces characters, sets plot in motion, and generates information about the play. Rising action or complication weaves the characters in a situation that leads to the climax. The climax is the apex of the conflict and it is at this point that the outcome of the conflict is determined. The denouement is the resolution of the conflict. It is at this stage that tangled situations begin to untangle themselves. This classical structural pattern is completely absent in all the plays under study. One can hardly say where the structures of *Dream*, *Malchochon*, *The Sea*, *O Babylon!* and *Pantomime* begin and end. In Besong's, Nkengasong's and Al-Hakim's plays as well, there are no precised structural patterns. Walcott, Besong, Nkengasong and Al-Hakim structure their plays in episodes, movements, parts, fragments and sequences. Even when the plays are structured in acts and scenes like the case of *Dream*, *Ti-Jean*, *Black Caps* and *Fate of the Cockroach*, the classical structural flow of events are violated

In *Dream* for example, the climax of the play comes at the end of the play when Makak beheds the White Woman. *Dream* is structurally divided into two parts. Part one consists of the prologue and three scenes all of which are focused on the various stages in the development of Makak's dream. Walcott establishes in this first part the West Indian nature of the play – what the note on production describes as a style that “should be spare, essential as the details of a dream” (220). The play works through a Brechtian model that destroys ‘the suspension of disbelief’ or, in the words of the playwright, introduces political issues to the audience/reader ‘with the same precision and the vitality that one has read of in the Kabuki’ (220). The first major political proposition in the play comes from Jean Paul Sartre's prologue to Frantz Fanon's classic of neo-colonial politics. The precarious physical and spiritual state of the colonized being is the subject of Fanon's thesis and the prologue by Sartre establishes the process that leads to the subsequent dissociation of the self:

Thus in certain psychoses the hallucinated person, tired of always being insulted by his demon, one fine day starts hearing the voice of an angel who pays him compliments; but the jeers don't stop for all that; only, from then on, they alternate with congratulations. This is a defense, but it is also the end of the story. The self is dissociated, and the patient heads for madness. (211).

The patient (Makak) in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* however, does not simply head for madness. The play, unlike Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* or *The Interpreters* for example, is not swamped in madness but restricted to the edges of subversive un-naming. It is true however that culture, religion, politics, material/economic dispossessions and above all, history have combined to render Makak psychotic but the pursuit of a disorderly and useless science that would facilitate his descent into madness proper was merely broached, not embarked on as the story, especially if perceived in relation as its structures portray. In *Ti -Jean*, the climax of the play equally comes at the end when *Ti-Jean* outwits and defeats the Devil. In *Pantomime*, the climax of the conflict is seen at the stage where Jackson begins to improvise and in *Malchochon*, with the killing of Chantal.

In *Requiem*, *Beasts* and *The Banquet*, the climax comes at the end when the masses attack their dictators. In *Requiem* and *The Banquet*, tension heightens toward the end as Akhikirikikii and Mbozo'o and their followers are over thrown by a popular up-rising. While in *Beasts*, the storming of Aadingingin's marble palace at the end of the play by the Night-Soil-Men with pockets of shit constitutes the climax of the play. In *Black Caps and Red Feathers*, Nkengasong structures his play in two acts but the events in the story are completely unrelated. Act one has just Creature talking to himself and recounting his ordeals. In act two, there is a conversation between Creature and the voice of the invincible ghost of Traourou with Creature seemingly interrogating Traourou's ghost. The climax of the play comes at the end with Creature's swooning and this is followed by a sustained thunder blast.

Al -Hakim's *Fate of the Cockroach* is structured in three acts with each having a subtitle and telling a different story. Act one tells the story of "The cockroach as King", act two, "the Cockroach's Struggle" and act three is titled "The Fate of the Cockroach". The three unrelated stories all geared towards satirizing the realities in the Egyptian society and it becomes impossible to place the play within the ambit of classical drama in terms of its structural pattern. The climax of the play seems to come at the end when Adil calls and on his wife Samia to bring a bucket and rag and wipe him out of existence

In all, the plays under study, with the exception of *Ti-Jean* and *O Babylon!*, there is a conscious attempt to deconstruct the classical doctrine of a plays structure as the playwrights embark in a series of structural innovations. Walcott structures his plays in either a single scene as in *The Sea*, *Malcochon* and *Pantomime*, or parts as in *Dream*. Besong on his part use movements, episodes, fragments and multiple set scenes. Nkengasong and Al- Hakim use acts. Even in cases where the plays are structurally divided into scenes and acts, the classical four structural patterns are violated.

Moreover, at the level of characterization, Walcott, Besong, Nkengasong and Al- Hakim adhere to the absurdist tradition by focusing their attention on characters which according to Aristotle, should not be found in plays. The main characters in these plays are not of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. The main characters are common people who care for the well-being of their fellow men. They shun all the vices inherent in the lives of the bourgeoisie such as corruption, exploitation, tyranny and oppression amongst others. They are admired by the masses for their courage and have socialist visions. The main characters are people from the lower class whose problems symbolically become that of the masses.

Dream focuses on the life and activities of Makak, a charcoal burner whose problems become the plight of West Indians of African descent. *Ti-Jean* equally center's on the life of Gross-Jean, Mi-Jean and Ti-Jean who all symbolized the West Indian

masses and their confrontation with the White Devil symbolized by Planter.

The drama in *The Sea* center's around six characters whose lives become a reflection of the dilemmas of the Afro-West Indian masses. Their lives are characterized by deprivation and hardship because the land is infertile, the sea unpredictable, and these problems are accentuated by the fishermen who set out against all odds and end up drowning one after the other. As in *Dream*, *Ti-Jean* and *The Sea*, the characters one encounters in *Malcochon*, *O Babylon!* and *Pantomime* are of the lower class. There are characters whose activities are a reflection of the complexities that characterizes Afro-West Indian existence. They are continuously pre-occupied with the search for a home, identity and roots. They are in classical dramatic terms, characters that should not find themselves at the centre of serious drama.

The drama in *Zombie* pivots around two main characters that are not the dignified, respectable characters of traditional drama. They are despicable lepers on crutches and the playwright refers to them as "ejected...leprous troglodytes, professional beggars" just as in Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialist*. In *Black Caps*, the main characters are Creature and Lunatic describing the inhuman conditions they are subjected to by a dictatorial regime. In *Requiem* and *Beasts*, the stories x-ray the predicaments of the masses of Agidigidi, symbolized by Boy and Woman, and Ednouay, symbolized by the Night-Soil-Men, Blindman and Cripple respectively. In *Change Waka*, *The Banquet* and *Great Lepers* respectively, action is centred around ordinary people whose lives and experiences in the various fictive societies Besong projects are a true testimony of what oppression, dictatorship and exploitation can do to a people. The lives of the masses as exemplified in these plays have been transformed into a perpetual nightmare by a callous and inhuman leadership. Any attentive reader of Besong's drama is subtly alerted that in terms of characterization, these plays are not the normal, traditional plays. Although Besong uses in almost all his plays very ordinary characters who are engaged in menial jobs, some of them in

terms of names and activities carry a lot of signification if placed within the political and historical context of post independent Cameroon.

Similarly, Nkengasong uses Creature and Lunatic as main characters and their utterances are reminiscent of that of madmen. Nevertheless, their plights become that of the oppressed masses in an oppressive and dictatorial regime. Al Hakim on his part uses Cockroaches and Ants to represent humanity and their problems become that of the Egyptian masses. Though allegory is considered a western influence, Al -Hakim contextualizes his use of allegory to explore and exploit the socio-political and economic realities that characterizes society.

Unlike classical drama which mostly centre's on the lives of respectable personalities like kings, Dukes, Barons, Knights, amongst others, postcolonial drama as exemplified above, concentrates on the lives and activities of ordinary men. The plays portray man as he is and not as he ought to be. Also, the plight of the major characters are not caused by their tragic flaw as is the case with classical drama, but are imposed on them by the colonial and post-colonial leadership. Walcott, Besong, Nkengasong and Al -Hakim present characters who are portrayed not as passive on lookers and victims of oppression, but as subjects of their own history, who are actively involved in the socio-political process for change.

Meaning and artistic vision in the plays under study are communicated through form. One cannot but mention here that the absence of a well-structured and organized plot, the use of folklore, songs, chorus, mime, allegory and Creole exposes Walcott's aesthetic ideology. Besong on his part uses mimes, movements, flashbacks, songs, proverbs, multiple set scenes, symbolism, voices, buffoonery, parody, shit imagery, ringing of the bell, and like Walcott, the absence of an organized plot and structure, and the concentration on ordinary characters constitute his aesthetic ideology. Nkengasong uses songs, mime, rhetorical questions, proverbs, voices, dream experience, compact imagery, neologism, surrealism to tell his story. Al- Hakim employs

allegory, a play within a play, songs and the concentration on ordinary insects like cockroaches and ants to tell his story.

As portrayed in their plays, the representation in structural forms, inter-textual parody, and historiography as performance, multiple set scenes, distorted and unsettling images constitute the similarities and innovative modes of representing reality and experimenting with form in the plays of Walcott, Besong, Nkengasong and Al-Hakim. The playwrights' modes and techniques incorporate realism, historicism, Marxism, Modernism and Post-modernism. While Besong, Nkengasong and Al-Hakim to a greater extent remain extremist experimental playwrights with unquenchable appetites to break away from the classical dramatic canons, Walcott on his part has been accused by some critics for his constant mélange of classical and new dramatic conventions in some of his plays and it is as a result of this that his aesthetics have been described as being that of a mulatto. There is plenty of evidence in his plays to qualify him as a playwright who has been influenced enormously by classical dramatic tenets though such influences do not completely wipe away his West Indian identity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Walcott's, Besong's, Nkengasong's and Al Hakim's deviation from the Aristotelian tenets of playwriting is in themselves a genuine step by the dramatists to liberate postcolonial drama from the pangs of Western dogma. Their attempts therefore are to persuade readers to see postcolonial drama, as different from Western or classical drama. It is in this light that Chinweizu in *The West and The Rest of Us* concludes that "Those who do not see Africa and the West as two distinct societies with different histories, with different problems, values and sense of fulfillment --- encourage an assimilation of African arts to Western tradition". (qtd in *Mask* 15) Though made with reference to African drama, Chinweizu's comments very much apply to Caribbean literature for Walcott, even when he borrows from classical patterns, incorporates elements and feature that are uniquely West

Indian as an attempt to liberate West Indian literature from Western tradition.

From Chinweizu's arguments, and from an aesthetic standpoint, to say therefore that the plays of Walcott, Besong, Nkengasong and Al-Hakim are formless is to encourage an assimilation of postcolonial arts to Western tradition. Thus, as Nyamndi has suggested, a play's "very formlessness is in itself form... it is usually that form for which we have no name" (37). One may certainly not have a definite name for these playwrights' formlessness. After all, as true Marxists that they are and as Eagleton has suggested, the aim of Marxism is to liberate literature and criticism from the magic spell of that liberal dogma which sees art as "organizing the chaos of reality, as imposing form on the formless, order on the amorphous" (96). Walcott, Besong, Nkengasong and Al-Hakim can therefore be seen as writers who at some point borrow from classical tenets, incorporate their local realities, and experiment with new dramatic forms to tell the story of their fractured postcolonial societies. Aesthetics therefore becomes a veritable instrument for the emancipation of postcolonial drama from Western canons

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