INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCE (IJRISS)
ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS |Volume VII Issue VII July 2023

Kamau Brathwaite's Linguistic Experimentations in Born to Slow Horses

Abegunde, Clement Tayo & Oderinde Adedayo Obafemi
Department of English and Communication, Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin.

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.70718

Received: 09 June 2023; Accepted: 23 June 2023; Published: 27 July 2023

ABSTRACT

Language and identity debate has been one of the focal points in postcolonial discourse. The contact between the colonial master and the colonized has, in no small measure, aided English language prominence in the world at large. It has unarguably contributed to its development. In Africa, question on status of English language and its usage continue to generate controversies without any conclusion. Thus, the search for the authentic linguistic expression for African literary writers continues. The aim of this paper is to examine how Kamau Brathwaite deploys unconventional use of English language to assert the Caribbean experience in Born to Slow Horses where he questions the authority of English language by violating most of its structural and lexical rules. It employed descriptive method with review of language situations in Brathwaite's works. Through the method Brathwaite creates a truly Caribbean English that is capable, to an extent, to represent the Caribbean psyche and literary concern. This paper proposed that African writers can also engage in this effort to deanglisize the English language using it to create an entirely African postcolonial English language that is capable of representing our African cultural and historical experiences.

Key words: Language, Identity, Postcolonial, English language, Deanglisise and Experience.

INTRODUCTION

Language and identity debate remains one of the focal points in postcolonial discourse. The contact between the colonial master and the colonized has, in no small measure, aided European languages' prominence in Africa and the world at large – it has unarguably contributed to the development of the English language as a global language. While this has benefited the centre, the development is seen in the erstwhile colonies as disruption in the identity formation. In his seminal work on colonialism, Fanon (2004) discusses extensively the place and importance of language to both the European masters and the colonized in the colonial regime. Fanon (2004) identifies language as the major means through which the master succeeded in separating black children from their cultural values. He unequivocally argues that English language is a tool of oppression and dehumanization, which puts the destinies of the colonized in the control of the colonial regime. Fanon's (2004) position on the issue of language and identity is aptly summarized by Ilo (2006):

A person who has taken up the language of the colonizer has accepted the world of the colonizer and therefore the standard of the colonizer. This view of language (…) implies that particular languages embody distinctive ways of experiencing the world, of defining what we are. That is, we not only speak in particular languages, but more fundamentally become the person we become because of the particular language community in which we grew up (…). Language, above all else, shapes our distinctive ways of being in the world. Language is the carrier of a peoples' identity, the vehicle of a certain way of seeing things, experiencing and feeling, determinant of particular outlooks on life (p. 2).

This paper examines how Kamau Brathwaite experiments with his nation language and creates a distinct

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS |Volume VII Issue VII July 2023

English language that is capable of representing the Caribbean experiences. It is based on the notion that postcolonial writers do not need to seek for another alternative to English language in their search for linguistic expression. The English language can still be used to represent our experiences by injecting it with our culture thus creating a new language that we crave.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND MULTILINGUAL POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS

Two groups of critics have emerged from the language debate. One of these groups supports Fanon's (2004) position. It is christened 'abrogationist' by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffen (2007). Prominent among the critics in this group is Ngugi wa Thiong'O' who, in one of his collection of essays, agitates for abrogation of the English language in African literature and adoption of an indigenous African language as the language of African literature. According to Ashcroft et al (2007), abrogation is "a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of traditional and fixed measuring 'inscribed' in the words (p. 37).

The other process through which writers of the postcolonial world respond to the question of language is tagged 'appropriation' in which English language is subverted to accommodate postcolonial experiences of the colonies. Appropriation is the "process by which the language is made to 'bear the burden of one's own cultural experience (…) language is adopted as a tool and utilized to express widely differing cultural experiences" (p. 38).

In the history of literature, there are varied examples of the colonized adopting the colonial language as a medium of communication. In fiction, Friday is taught English in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719). In drama, Shakespeare's Caliban, the indigenous of the island, provides a well-known example of such a strategy in The Tempest (1623). "You taught me language, and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse: the real plague rid you / For learning me your language" (p. 39). Caliban tells the foreign Prospero. This strategy of creatively adopting and adapting the language of the 'other' to create "a synthetic revolutionary culture in place of the bastardized or eradicated indigenous culture of the colonized" (Soyinka 1993, p.139) had a strong appeal to Soyinka who called for exposing the colonizer's language to a deliberate process of appropriation to answer the local needs of the natives. He explains this strategy in an articulate manner as thus:

And when we borrow an alien language to sculpt or paint in, we must begin by coopting the entire properties in our matrix of thought and expression. We must stress such a language, stretch it, impact and compact it, fragment and reassemble it with no apology, as required to bear the burden of experiencing and of experiences, be such experiences formulated or not in the conceptual idioms of that language. (Soyinka 1993, p.107).

While African poets returned to their own languages and culture to 'appropriate' the Standard English to suit their literary demands, the Caribbean story is different. Hardly do poets in the Caribbean have a single native language to return to. After being conveyed to the 'new world' the colonizers prohibited the slaves from using their language. This was to suppress any possible revolt against the colonizers. The English language was imposed to replace the tribal languages of the slaves. Thus, the people had to communicate with what Glissant calls a 'forced poetics' which gives rise to inconsistency between the lived experience and its expression in an alien system of signification.

For linguistic survival the slaves, followed by their descendants, had to form their own languages "as antidotes, a non-neutral one through which the problems of the community can be restated" (Dash 1989, p. x). The submerged language which has a tendency for cultural resistance is tagged nation language by Brathwaite. Brathwaite's work(1984) gives details of the emergence, operations and relations to the English language in the Anglophone Caribbean.

Brathwaite (1984) defines the nation language as the language which is influenced very strongly by the African made of African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage. For English, it may be in terms of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them might be English to a greater or lesser degree… it is not English that is the agent, it is not language, but people who make its evolution (p. 13).

As an alternative to the English language, nation language became a tool that could be used to represent the Caribbean consciousness in no way English language could. Its subversive quality makes it more appealing to the people. While the colonizer wants the colonized to speak his language and receive its values, the colonized produces a distorted version of his linguistic registers.

LINGUISTIC EXPERIMENTATIONS IN BORN TO SLOW HORSES

Brathwaite published Born to Slow Horses a decade after the publication of his X/Self. At the end of Born to Slow Horses, Brathwaite explicitly defines the new phase of his writing as a continuation of his "post-catastrophe" poetry, referring to the work he completed in the years following three major traumatic events in his personal life – his wife's death from cancer, Hurricane Gilbert's destruction, and the experience of being assaulted and robbed in his own home – all of which he documents in Shar (1990), The Zea Mexican Diary (1993), and Trench Town Rock (1999). Brathwaite names this period of intense personal traumatization, his "Time of Salt," which he clarifies "as the years 1986-1900 which witnessed in rapid catastrophic succession, the death of his wife Zea Mexican (1986), the destruction by hurricane of their home and archives at Irish Town in the high hills outside Kingston (1988) and his own near death at the hands of brigand gunmen in his Kingston apartment in 1990, all chronicled in his groundbreaking 'postcatastrophe' work" (BTSH, p. 142).

WRITING THE 'VOICE' IN THE 'PRINT WORD'

Brathwaite affirms that his concern is basically with the word, both written and spoken. In other words, they are concerned with the struggle to represent their people's literary and historical experiences in writing without losing its orality, which is the primary basis of their literatures. In pursuit of this vision, Brathwaite invented the "Sycorax Video Style", which according to him, can be used to describe Caribbean experiences of slavery, indenture and fragmentation. He thus designed a Caribbean linguistic answer to the English language question with the aid of his nation language.

Sycorax Video Style is an aspect of Brathwaite's rebellion against the dominant role of English language in the Caribbean culture and education. It involves intentional deviations from English standard grammatical rules and other nonconventional practices to subvert it. For instance, in most of Brathwaite's poems, there are prevalent uses of different fonts in the same poem, typographical breaks, icons, images all of which are made possible by the use of his nation language or Creole. The importance of the style is emphasized by Griffiths (2013) when she says that "What his (Brathwaite's) Sycorax Video Style does is to cement for us how distinctive our speech is from English, it is symbolic of a struggle of displacement, fragmentation and exploitation, and of strength of the Caribbean people in constructing ways to survive and triumph collectively" (p. 2).

To achieve poetry that counters European tradition of writing, Brathwaite deploys visual aspects of poetry to accompany its voice system in support of the thematic concerns of the poets. Brathwaite calls the word processing tools that enable the writing of orality "nuances of language". They include fonts, line(dis)placements, typeface, typographic symbols, wordplay and page margins and these become means of distortion to build up Afro-Caribbean "kingdoms of the word" (Nair 2005). With his experimentation with

words, Brathwaite tries to form a new linguistic order. "He uses the printed page as if it were sound where written poetry is a raid on border between the inner and outer voices, what is heard and what remains in the mind" (James 1994, p. 73). The speaking "I" or the collective "we" in the poems of these postcolonial poets implies the "location and locution of poetic voice" that "repeat[s] and reverberate[s] across historically specific moments of the minority predicament" (Bhabha 2006, p. xxii). The speaking subject tries to appropriate an interstitial place in the "uncanny fluency of another's language" (ibid. p. 199). All these styles are impossible without the adoption of the nation language (Natasha 2008). For instance, there is intentional and radical departure from the Standard English structural rules.

The deviations and radical adoption of unconventional use of English language is noticeable right from the content page of Born to Slow Horses. A critical reading of the names of titles and their arrangements quickly offers the audience what to expect in the work. Brathwaite's linguistic and typography system offers a critique of dominant approaches to history and how history is inscribed. Readers begin to encounter Brathwaite's intentional deviations in the arrangement of the content page. The collection is in seven major divisions with the omission of section seven which is replaced with 9/11, all with varying fonts. The titles are informed from English language, history, and Brathwaite's own creativity. Bermudas is a British colony named after the explorer, Juan de Bermudas. Guanahani was the first Island sighted and visited by Christopher Columbus on October 12, 1492. Donna is an Italian name for woman. Mmassaccourraaman is a name of Guyanese legend of the monstrous river snake. Kumina is a religion which is associated with the Africans in the Caribbean. Namsetoura is the most significant of all the non-English titles because the name comes from Brathwaite's conception of Caribbean identity through naming.

"Naming" the new world with the appropriation of signs is a common practice among Caribbean poets. Walcott (1996) asserts that the language of poetry opposes colonial ideology and its established institutions. Thus, people that were subdued under slavery and indenture are to rename the nouns. "The process of renaming, or finding new metaphors, is the same process that the poet faces every morning of his working day, making his own tools like Crusoe, assembling nouns from necessity…even renaming himself" (p. 506-7). Bhabha (2006) defines this strategy as "the right to signify" that provides a medium of agency:

"[A] specifically postcolonial performance of reinscription, the focus shifts from nominalism of imperialism to the emergence of other sign of agency and identity. It signifies the destiny of culture as a site, not simply of subversion and transgression, but one that prefigures a kind of solidarity between ethnicities that meet in the tryst of colonial history (p. 331)."

Brathwaite prefers an alternative name for "Nyam" and it becomes central to Brathwaite's understanding of the agency of naming in X/Self. He explains in his notes to X/Self that "nam" or "nyam" is "indestructible self/sense of culture under crisis" (p. 127, emphasis original). Brathwaite searches for the root of this word throughout X/Self. "Nam" is 'man' in disguise when written backwards "man/nam" or "the main or mane of name after the weak 'e' or tail has been eaten by the conquistador." Apart from these connotations, it might denote the future potential of "atomic explosion: nam…dynamo…dynamite and apotheosis: nam…nyam…onyame…" (X/Self, p. 127). The meaning of "Nam" is appropriated by moving from one image to another. The first lines of "Nam" represent the African man with cinematic images:

hot cinema tarzan sweat

rolling moth ball eyes yellow teeth

cries of claws slashes clanks (X/self, p. 73).

African people are ironically described as savage and demonic.

'Namsetoura' is derived from "name" and "stories" – the story of name – Brathwaite gives the name to the ghost that appeared to him at Cow Pastor. However, 'Nam' means more to Brathwaite's poetry. Brathwaite's name for "originary" or virtual world which is neither a "there" nor "property" is nam, an "in-dwelling man-inhabiting organic force" of any concrete cultural milieu". It is a genetic force that has no part, cannot be divided, partitioned or parcel without changing its nature. He compares nam with grit and pebbles seed safe secret

-Unquestioned not necessarily visible-

of which strength comes, where the heart

of the culture resides in its orderness (Golokwati 2002, p. 238)

In an interview in 2005, Brathwaite explains nam as a "concept of the mind which is opposite of man's mind. 'Man' spelt backward, as 'nam' also means an imperishable spirit; so 'man' is a distortion of 'nam'. And Namse is a version of Anansi the Spider. So the Spider is part of 'Nam' and the 'Nam' is part of the Spider. And 'toura' is a way of telling stories." (p. 3). Thus, Brathwaite subverts the original English word 'name' to create nam in his search for the Caribbean original identity. Nam has been a central subject in Ancestors. His concern is not just on the linguistic meaning of the nam. It is clear that part of the value of nam is its graphic form – its utopic reach.

Brathwaite develops many strategies on word level to play upon the meaning of words and discover other possible meanings. Firstly, the meanings of words are used against themselves through puns, neologisms and made-up phrases. As Chamberlin (1995) argues, these strategies "reflect a deep seriousness about the ways in which words determine our representations of self and our perception of others" (p. 33). Like X/self, Born to Slow Horses is full of puns, neologisms and catachrestic use of the Prospero's language.

Ashcroft, Tiffen and Griffiths (2001) argue that development of neologisms in postcolonial text is one of the tactics of syntactic fusion that becomes "a sign of the co-existentivity between language and cultural space, and are important features of the development of English variants" (p. 71). Neologism is the use of made-up words or new words. Brathwaite deploys many words that are strange to the English standard lexicon. In 'Guanahani' "odales" much like "xpectation" and "landscap" is a neologism (made-up/new words) or portmanteaux that combines "oh" and "dales" (meaning valley) but ellipts the "h" for musical effect. Symbolically, "x" is scattered all around the poems taking the place of the prefix "ex-. For instance, inxtricably (p. 9), xpose (p. 11), xplode and xplore (p. 17), unxpecting (p, 23), xhausted (p. 48), xile (p. 48), nxt (49), unXpecting (p. 73) are common words in this collection. Other words derived from intentional twisting or disorganizing the correct spellings include swimmming (p. 2), bubbelling (p. 3), freize (p. 8), askanancy (p. 9), freeling (p. 11), cosmograms (p. 12), cirrus (p. 14), uttarest (p. 48), miggle (occurs in many instances) to replace or complement middle, fubgeting (p. 36) and scarifice (p. 60). At times, the use of these forms nearly creates ambiguity in readers' minds provoking creative thoughts in order to arrive at Brathwaite's intended meaning.

Brathwaite also uses abbreviations that are not recognised in the Standard English writing. Most auxiliary verbs are reduced to two alphabets. "Would" is written as "wd"; "could" becomes "cd"; "should" becomes "sd" and the relative pronoun "which" becomes "wc". When the preposition "with" precedes a word, "w+slash" are used: w/ribs (p. 5), w/sweet (p. 8), w/out (p.11), w/flesh (p. 11) all in efforts to demonstrate "how words determine our representations of self and other" (Chamberlain 1996, p. 33).

Brathwaite questions the fact that the authority of the written word is readily acknowledged and disseminated. As soon as the word is written, it is received as "holy writ and late holly". Mackey (1996)

says, the word's "monumental premises" are established. Thus, the main function of this linguistic subversion at the explicit level is to show "the divisibility and the alterability of words, their permeability to alternate arrangement, variability, change" (p. 139). This clearly confirms Brathwaite's perception of the word which he expresses in 'Veve':

For on this ground

trampled with the bull's swathe of whips

where the slave at the crossroads was a red anthill

eaten by moonbeams, by the holy ghosts of his wounds

the Word becomes

again a god and walks among us;

look, here are his rags,

here is his crutch and his satchel

of dreams; here is his hoe and his rude implements

on this ground

in this broken ground

(The Arrivants, p. 263)

Thus, the word is not strange to Brathwaite. He therefore possesses the license to twist it to suit his social and cultural demands and Brathwaite has accomplished this to a greater degree. Brathwaite's verbal dexterity helps him in his bid to capture several unrelated themes and motifs from colonial history to personal tragedy and to the modern Caribbean history in Born to Slow Horses:

Kamau & Dream Chad coil in each others blood. She

tieing the discomfort his tears for her dead son

while she bleeds as her sun keels from its its mangle wheel .

hit off late night midnight bi-

cycle middle passage ship

By rat-racing-on-our-highways new-money quick-monkey

illegal-jjugs-money-traffikin cyaar –

BMW Audi the sleek black latest luxury Discord or Ellectra

or streak Ajax Mardza or Alexandria – in Papine –

rrol Hill beggarmanpoem – Slade Hopkinson & Breeze

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS |Volume VII Issue VII July 2023

madwoman poems

Ogou. Soyinka. Dennis Scotts Dog.Tony McNeilt'sUngod.Vere Bell's Gog –

they all happen here–

the unceremonial graveyard. Thirsty & unappeased –

of yout, artists. Don gorgon. Caribbean

slaves. Eee-

lectric politricks & politricans. Big big-time robber baroms

(BTSH, pp. 73-74)

Brathwaite effectively uses pun to invent and discover other meanings of words and thus emphasizes the impression of the authority upon words. This style often throws readers into a state of imbalance slowing down the reading and at the same time forcing readers to process the words to get likely meanings expressed. In 'The Masters of Mary Jones' tale' and 'tail' are combined to reinscribe the Caribbean history where image of the sea is prominent. Tail refers to past of a being and tale refers to story:

It have come to his tail from the web tides

Out of the wood and the wave leave watch

of his lonely fisherman's sea

and that night it is scale with the Milky Way green

star flame and blue fish foam . and its tale

it make of the night watch bumps of smaller travelling fish

harbouring under the boat . and its sailing eyes

is the night wich moon and the water star strike bright (BTSH, p. 4).

In 'Kumina', 'socks, and 'shocks'; 'sun' and 'sun'; 'death' and 'debt' are played upon suggesting though different but related meanings on close assessment.

demtief-off evva thing they fine pun Mark

So when he went down to the policestation morgue that night

My son mange up widdoutim shoes &shocks

on the fourteenth day after my sun gone, on the first day after him entomb

i feel my womb (BTSH, p. 78)

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCE (IJRISS)
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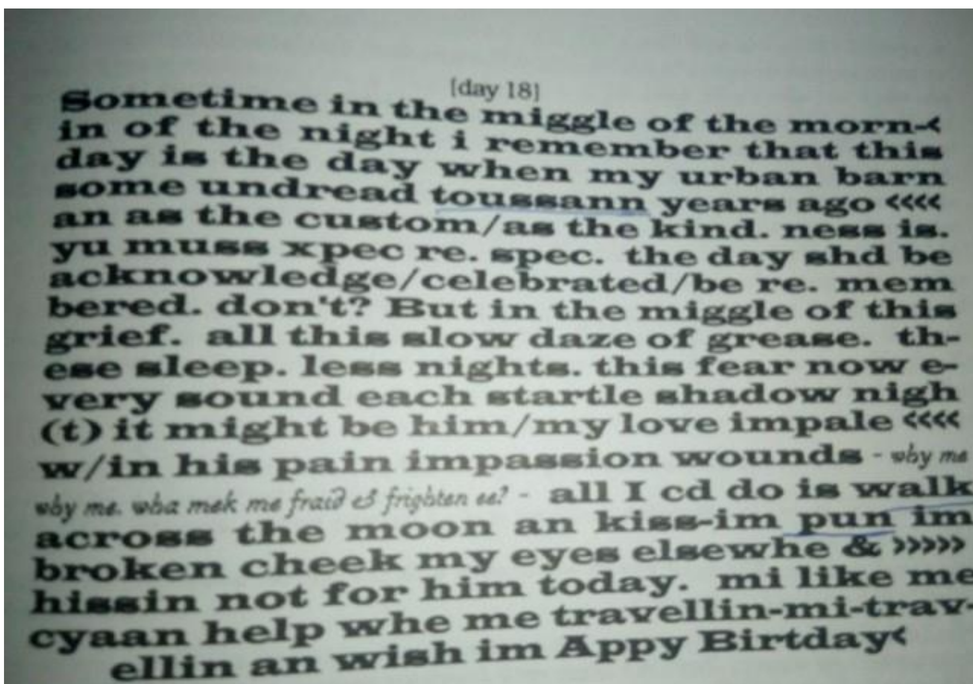
"Socks" are worn on the feet with shoes while 'shocks' suggests the cease of his movement as adead person cannot move; 'death' is seen as a 'debt' that Mark in this poem has paid; 'son' refers to Markthe son of the persona while 'sun' suggests that the deceased is the persona's source of joy and light; 'tired' is used to coin 'tireen(th)' by removing sound /t/ for sound effect; fubjeting replaces forgetting or fidgeting while. In 'Hawk' "murthered" is used to depict the world as a place of disasters and at the same a 'a mother' of all beings. Thus, Brathwaite revised words and concepts that come to the poet through the imposed language. With this experiment, he crosses the cultural borders in new and experimental ways by "arrest[ing] the linguistic sign in its symbolic function" (Bhabha 2005, p. 69).

IRREGULAR PUNCTUATION

Playing with punctuation marks is also a very effective tool in Brathwaite's poetry. Brathwaite subverts the conventional use of punctuation marks in written English and assigns them new functions in the text. Brathwaite ends none of his poems in this collection with a full-stop, which ties all poems to one another forming up a macro-poem. As Mackey (1996) observes, "words are broken not only by line breaks but by punctuation marks inserted between syllables" (p. 138). Brathwaite uses full stop between the same words to separate syllables "enthusiass. tic (p. 55); or divides "a" that is written together with "–divider" (p. 67); re.member (p. 85); kind.ness (p. 85); for.ver (p. 85); eve.ning (p. 93); rage.ing (p. 95); wake.ning (p. 98). The spaces between the full stops and the last syllables confirm the poet's purpose for inserting them to suggest long pauses for rhythm. Brathwaite avoids the conventional use of full stops in the collection. While full stops are applied at the end of sentence, he applies them in between lines to break statements. In 'Bread' full stops occurs at the end of lines three out of twenty-eight times, in those times, they are spaced from the last word in the lines. This suggests that they are used for different purpose. In Beth Petrone's speech in the HBO/TV Memorial Tribute to the Heroes of 9/11 (26 May 2002): "… for her own beautiful self . and for all the women of this poem's world in New York Rwanda Kingston Iraq Afghanistan…" (BTSH, p. 105). That the places listed here are not separated by commas indicates the kind of transboundary, transhistorical connections and fragmentations Brathwaite communicates throughout the poem.

Unconventional uses of punctuation marks are also noticeable in this passage from 'Kumina':


[day 18]
Sometime in the miggle of the morn-‹
in of the night i remember that this
day is the day when my urban barn
some undread toussann years ago ‹‹‹‹
an as the custom/as the kind. ness is.
yu muss xpec re. spec. the day shd be
acknowledge/celebrated/be re. mem
bered. don't? But in the miggle of this
grief. all this slow daze of grease. th-
ese sleep. less nights. this fear now e-
very sound each startle shadow nigh
(t) it might be him/my love impale ‹‹‹‹
w/in his pain impassion wounds - why me
why me. wha mek me fraid & frighten ee? - all I cd do is walk
across the moon an kiss-im pun im
broken cheek my eyes elsewhe & ›››››
hissin not for him today. mi like me
cyaan help whe me travellin-mi-trav-
ellin an wish im Appy Birtday‹

(BTSH, p. 83)

The passage above is full of irregular breaking of words and lines with full stops, slash and other punctuation marks. Rather than being used to mark units of sense, most punctuation marks are employed as rhythmic device, shaping units of breaths throughout the collection. Morris (1993) suggests that typographically, some slashes "function like images of weapon – the knife, the hammer slashing, bashing" (p. 18). Virtually, the above extract communicates regret, mourning and anger.

Unusual and unconventional capitalization is deployed throughout the collection but for different results. Capitalization in Born to Slow Horse takes many forms. Sometimes, proper noun starts with lower case in violation of the Standard English grammar. For instance, the name 'Columbus' occurs four times in the text and it starts with capital letter only once. New York is also written as 'new york' (p 109) in 'Hawk 9/11' twice. In both instances, the use of the lower cases suggests Brathwaite's animosity against the colonial oppression perpetrated by "columbus" as a renegade and New York as one of the capitals of the imperial powers.

USE OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Personal pronouns feature prominently in both collections hinging on the poets' proximity to the stories in their texts. Brathwaite gives preference to 'i' and "I" over other personal pronouns. The consistent shift in the personae is what Mosoti (2012) calls "fluid persona" and the style is purposely employed by postcolonial writers to make them part of the group whose story is told (Dathorne 1975). It suggests that postcolonial writers are telling stories that belong to their community. Therefore, as an agency, their voices are the communal voices which express major concerns of such community. Despite this observation, the individual voice of the writers cannot be suppressed as the experiences of the writers form the bulk of the works. To balance both sides, Brathwaite and makes use of pronouns that refer to himself as persona and other personae as members of the communities whose concern they express.

Collet (2009) generally refers to the 'I' and 'i' in Brathwaite's poetry as the "complex eye". It is pertinent to note that Brathwaite's Born to Slow Horses is not only based on Brathwaite's experiences of personal trauma, violence and catastrophes in his home in Jamaica but also on other global disasters. For the records, Born to Slow Horses is not a unified narrative but a collection of poems, many of which have been revised from earlier collections and compiled here. Though Brathwaite himself has explained that "there is not 'large theme' here since Born to Slow Horses is not long-poems like Masks or Mother Poems, but a collection of poems variously themes … arranged more or less chronologically" (cited in Opal 2007, p. 55). This specially accounts for the use of the fluid personae.

The critical view of the personal pronoun 'I' in Born to Slow Horses, according to Collet (2009), points to the poet's own/or another specific person's experience while 'i' is used for general or communal experiences. In 'Ghahanaani', Braithwaite uses 'I' to describe his own experience during the flight over Turkeys:

Like the beginnings-o dalaes o adagiios- of island

from under the clouds where I write the first poem

its brown even warmth now that we recognize them

even from this thunders distance.

still w/out sound so much hope

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS |Volume VII Issue VII July 2023

Now around the heart of lightning that I begin to weep (BTSH, p. 13).

A similar scene occurs in 'Kumina'. The poem opens with 'I' shifting to 'he' and 'we' on page 88-89, back to 'I' and 'we' on page 90. The pronoun shifts to 'I' on page 94 as the bereaved mother talks of her experience in a direct speech:

On the nineteen day afta my husband gone

-it seem sof long it seem

Mi fatha now altho I nur know no fatha

My husband gone back (BTSH, p. 94).

'Hawk' begins with the plural pronoun "we" and continuously shifts between the pronouns "we" "he" and "I" until it gets to part five where the fireman's widow pays homage to her husband. "I" in this part is a direct experience of the widow:

I was standing on the steps of city hall…. In all that duss

and I know …. That Jerry (her husband the captain of rescue 111would have been

On one floor(s) ….that he cd get to …to that building

for that's what his company does… and when Isaw the building come down

I knew that … he had no chance focused on the job

Sometimes I start to worry that he was …

but … knowing him

I think he was completely focused on the job at

… sometimes it makes me angry

(she gives here a little laugh of pain)

But I don't that he … (BTSH, p. 104).

The pronoun 'I' is adopted throughout this section making the experience personal.

In 'Iwa' "I" assumes a different status as it is used when the persona is in a strong position/state. The 'I' in the first two lines does not refer to the persona as a victim.

When my mother say I be alone

and when I cry

(she say)

i be columbus of my ships

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS |Volume VII Issue VII July 2023

And sail the garden round the tears that fall into my hand

i cry

but on the sea three nuns appear

black spaeks stalk the horizon of my fear

Sancta marias w/black silk sails

Were these the swift ships sent harbour?

Was this thhe fleet my pride unfurl?

Pirates in smiling ships. They rob the world I rule (BTSH, p. 31)

In the second line "I cry" suggests that the cry is not of sobriety. Instead, it is a cry of strength or pride. The third stanza confirms that he is in command. The last line does the same "… they rob the word I rule".

The pronoun "i" dominates the poems in Born to Slow Horses thus rendering the collection as a more of collective history and Brathwaite becomes the agency. Brathwaite uses the small letter "i" when the issues concern no specific person – the issues affect the generality or the anonymous "man". In 'Donna', a poem about women in Caribbean, the persona addresses a general woman in the extract below:

an de man i sleep with im

an i got me xam

an de man she mek i go wid im

an i can hardly stann to look pan im

but wht you go do when yuh belly gone slack & u young joking gifted an black? (BTSH, p.16)

At the beginning of this poem, the persona shifts from speaking of Donna in the third person to exclude himself making him an omniscient narrator. He changes to the small-lettered "i" thus incorporating a general situation. The persona is not just expressing her experience but the experience of every woman facing a similar reality. In this way, the persona is at the same time an individual expressing herself and an individual within representing a group. In the extract below the fluid persona style is overtly employed:

if this is all

I have

If this is all

I have

I can travel no far

-ther

you must pour

you must pour

you must pour me

out so the god

can enter the silver

so god can enter the river Reed 206

you must spill

me into the crack

(ed) ground

i am blood

i am pebble

root hairs & the dust of the thunders room.

I am water

i am blood

i am the hot rum leaking from green

from the clanking of iron (BTSH, p. 38)

The lines begin from the small letter "i" and shift to the 2nd person "you" and back to "I" thus cutting across the whole community. The 'i' is then adopted by Brathwaite as the Caribbean personae or any other person facing oppression in this collection. The "i realize" and "I have been thinking" suggest the poems as a series of thoughts which anyone can have anywhere. The 'i' that dominates Born to slow Horses suggests that Brathwaite's linguistic engagement is to craft a new language of the Caribbean origin with little or no influence of both the Standard English and the Nation Language.

Subjecting Brathwaite's structures to grammatical rules reveals a lot of creativity which, to native English speakers, are grammatical inconsistencies and errors. These structures are employed as a means to intentionally rebel against the English kingdom of the words. For instance, in 'The master of Mary Jones', structures like "flung of his wish have caught the sea", "he have fish so lost in this green", "All nigh he have fallow the tall tail, "for what have he watch in the fish" and "Lucaya. Abacus $now Elenthera comes into view" violate the English rule of concord. These styles are enhanced by Brathwaite's adherence to the flexible nature of the nation language which Brathwaite adopts as a viable alternative to the Standard English language in the Caribbean Isles.

Philip (1990) aptly summarizes Brathwaite's approach to English language in the following words:

The formal standard language was subverted, turned upside down, inside out and sometimes even erased. Nouns became strangers to verbs and vice versa; tonal accentuation took the place of several words at times.

Rhythms held sway. This used to be and sometimes still is referred to as bad English, broken English,patois, dialect,idiolect, but it is also the living legacy of an experience, the living legacy of a people trying and succeeding in giving voice to their experience in the best and sometimes the only way possible (p. 275).

CONCLUSION

Though the absence of definite traditional cultural literary practices to fall back upon has served as impetus for Caribbean poets', Brathwaite's radical approach has gone a long way in solving the language crisis. A similar approach has been successfully deployed by Kofi Anyidoho in Ancestral logic & Caribbean Blues and Praise Songs for the Land. Other African poets are therefore admonished to engage in this literary adventure. This is not only for the sake of promoting the rebellion against the English language but it also serves as a way of making the African literature written in English our own.

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ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS |Volume VII Issue VII July 2023

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BIODATA OF AUTHORS

Clement Tayo Abegunde is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and Communication, Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin. He has Bachelor degree in English and Master in Literature in English from University of Ilorin. He is on the final stage of his PhD degree in the University of Ilorin. His area of interest includes African poetry, Postcolonial poetry, literary theory, African fiction and Black poetry in the diaspora.

Oderinde Adedayo Obafemi is a Principal Lecturer in Kwara State Polytechnic where he teaches English language and Literature in English in the Department of English and Communication. He has Bachelor Degree in English and Master Degree in Languages from University of Ilorin and Kwara State University and respectively. His area of interest includes Pragmatics, Critical discourse analysis and Multi-modal Discourse Analysis. Unconventional uses of punctuation marks are also noticeable in this passage from 'Kumina'