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Romantic shores, postcolonial tides: A dialogue between British and Caribbean beach poetry

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Abstract: The concept of the beach as a liminal space—existing as a boundary between sea and land, as well as between nations—has captivated observers for centuries. The literary canon of British literature contains numerous poems that focus on the beach, including works by Matthew Arnold and William Wordsworth. This paper aims to expand upon the English tradition by comparing poems by British and postcolonial treatments of the beach by Anglophone Caribbean writers. It will focus specifically on the poetry of Derek Walcott, Olive Senior, Jean Binta Breeze, John Agard, and Grace Nichols. Considering that the Caribbean islands, much like Great Britain, are surrounded by the sea, Caribbean writers find themselves inevitably drawn to the subject of the beach. They explore its significance as a site of joy and sorrow, arrival and departure. Due to the fact that many Anglophone Caribbean writers live in exile, they often juxtapose their personal Caribbean experiences of the beach with the beaches of their new countries of residence. Thus, the beach becomes their initial encounter with their new “home”. Consequently, the beach, as depicted by the aforementioned authors, provides a backdrop for reflections on history and diaspora, facilitating comparisons and contrasts between the homeland and the new land, the Caribbean, and the European reality of their current lives. Within this framework, the beach is viewed as a gateway from the old home to the new one.

Keywords: beach poetry; British literature; Caribbean literature; postcolonial literature; romanticism; liminal space; diaspora; exile; identity

1. Introduction: Beach as a littoral space in literature

Richter and Kluwick emphasize that “studies of littoral space tend to stress [that] the beach is a liminal zone” [1]. Indeed, the beach, a liminal zone where land meets sea, has long served as a potent source of inspiration and thematic exploration in Anglophone poetry. This enduring fascination is particularly evident given the geographical realities of both the United Kingdom and the West Indies, island nations profoundly shaped by their relationship to the surrounding waters. Rivers, lakes, and, most significantly, the sea have permeated the collective consciousness and, consequently, the creative output of generations of poets. Within this framework, the beach emerges as a pivotal and transformative element:

The beach is an ambiguous place, an in-between place. It is a place where for much of the time nothing much seemingly happens: the tide comes and goes; people arrive to pass time in leisure activities; occasional ships anchor there. But at the same time, the beach is a place where everything transformational in the cultures of coastal peoples begins and ends. The tides create a shifting boundary between sea and land. Their effect is to emphasize the liminality of the beach as parts of it are successively revealed and then swamped by tidal action. The

boundary between sea and land alters on a daily basis. It is a neutral space, neither properly terrestrial nor yet thoroughly maritime, awaiting a metamorphic role [2].

The beaches define and mediate the boundary between the mutable expanse of water and the seemingly fixed domain of land. The significance of beaches, especially in the Victorian era for the re/definition of British identity and culture, is poignantly summarized by Payne:

The beach played an important role in nineteenth-century British art. In the early part of the century, Turner and Constable made repeated studies of waves crashing on beaches, in Margate and Brighton respectively... [Seaside visitors, shipwrecks, fishermen, women at work, rock formations] were part of the larger category of seascapes and coastal scenes, which acquired particular resonance in British culture because of their associations with the navy, and hence with the national character, and its assumed propensities for bravery, scientific enquiry, even democracy [3].

Similarly to British poetry, the beach occupies a central and multifaceted role in Caribbean Anglophone poetry, serving as both a physical space and a symbolic site that reflects colonial histories, diasporic identities, and ecological concerns. As a liminal space, the beach represents both connection and rupture—linking the Caribbean to its African and European pasts while simultaneously marking sites of forced displacement and cultural hybridization. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, a key figure in Caribbean poetics, often employs the beach as a space of historical reckoning, where the tide becomes a metaphor for the region's shifting identities and contested histories. Similarly, Derek Walcott's poetry frequently returns to the beach as a locus of memory and self-discovery, where the ocean functions as a repository of trauma, bearing witness to the transatlantic slave trade and the cultural fragmentation it engendered. Through the interplay of land and sea, Caribbean poets reconstruct historical narratives that challenge Eurocentric perspectives and foreground the resilience of local identities.

2. Analysis: British beaches and literary imagination

Beyond its historical and cultural significance, the beach in Caribbean poetry also engages with contemporary ecological and sociopolitical concerns. Recent Caribbean poets, such as Olive Senior and Kei Miller, depict the beach not only as a space of aesthetic beauty but also as a site of environmental vulnerability, where rising sea levels and climate change threaten both livelihoods and cultural heritage. The beach is thus imbued with anxieties over sustainability and loss, becoming a symbol of both paradise and precarity. Furthermore, the beach serves as a space of labor and tourism, where the economic realities of postcolonial Caribbean societies intersect with global capitalism. As postcolonial scholars such as Shalini Puri [4] have noted, representations of the beach in Caribbean literature often reflect the tensions between local agency and external economic pressures, making it a crucial site for interrogating issues of sovereignty and exploitation. In this way, Caribbean Anglophone poetry transforms the beach from a mere geographic feature into a dynamic space of cultural critique, historical remembrance, and ecological awareness. This section, while employing the method of close reading, analyzes the British literary tradition of beach

culture. An early and compelling example of the beach's symbolic potential is provided by Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595), a sonnet sequence dedicated to his wife, Elizabeth Boyle. "Sonnet LXXV", in particular, showcases the poet's initial ambition to celebrate and immortalize earthly love through a tangible act. The speaker, positioned on the beach, physically inscribes his beloved's name into the yielding sand: "One day I wrote her name upon the strand" [5]. This action, imbued with romantic idealism, immediately encounters the harsh reality of the natural world, as "came the waves and washed it away" [5]. This swift erasure highlights the fragility of human endeavors when confronted with the elemental forces of nature. Undeterred by this initial setback, the poet, driven by his desire for permanence, attempts to replicate his action: "Again I wrote it with a second hand" [5], suggesting a renewed effort and an unwavering belief in the power of his love. However, this second attempt is similarly thwarted, as "came the tide, and made my pains his prey" [5]. The personified tide, actively preying upon the speaker's efforts, underscores the futility of resisting the natural cycle of erosion and change. This repeated failure leads the poet to a gradual, and ultimately profound, realization of the inherent limitations of human agency and the transience of earthly existence. He questions the viability of seeking permanence in a realm defined by constant flux, acknowledging the folly of attempting to "A mortal thing so to immortalize" [5]. This realization marks a turning point in the sonnet, as the poet shifts his focus from the physical and temporal to the realm of art and the spiritual. He asserts that true and lasting immortality can only be achieved through the power of poetry, not through fleeting acts inscribed upon the sand:

My verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
And in the heavens write your glorious name:
Where whenas death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew [5].

Thus, despite the speaker's initial intention to secure earthly love against the ravages of time, symbolized by the encroaching tide, he ultimately transcends the limitations of the physical world. He arrives at a spiritual dimension, proposing an everlasting love that exists beyond the reach of the perpetual tide and the erosive forces of time. The beach, therefore, functions not merely as a picturesque backdrop but as a dynamic site of revelation, a space where the ephemeral nature of earthly endeavors is confronted and ultimately surpassed. As Richter and Kluwick observe, "In Darwinian nature, generation and death, evolution and extinction are always closely connected... the beach is a privileged site on which to observe this entanglement" [1]. The beach, in Spenser's hands, becomes a metaphor for the human condition itself—a constant negotiation between the desire for permanence and the inevitability of change.

Another compelling example of the beach's symbolic deployment is offered by Thomas Moore in his "I Saw from the Beach" (1815). Moore uses the beach to depict a transition from vibrant activity to desolate stagnation, observing a ship ("bark") initially "moving gloriously on" [6] the sea, only to become stranded as the tide recedes. The poem juxtaposes the morning's "shining" enthusiasm with the evening's gloom, mirroring the ebb and flow of life's passions.

I came when the sun o'er that beach was declining.
The bark was still there, but the waters were gone.

And such is the fate of our life's early promise,
So passing the spring-tide of joy we have known;
Each wave that we danced on at morning ebbs from us,
and leaves us, at eve, on the bleak shore alone [6].

These lines encapsulate the poem's central metaphor: the receding tide symbolizes the fading of youthful promise and joy. The initial energy and vitality inevitably diminish, leaving a sense of isolation and loss. Moore laments the inevitable decline of passion, contrasting the "wild freshness of Morning" [6] with the "calm eve of our night" [6] and yearning for the return of youthful fervor. Moore reflects on the transformative power of initial passion, comparing the soul to "the wood, that grows precious in burning," which generously "gave out all its sweets to love's exquisite flame." [6]. However, this intense passion is not sustainable; the flame dies out, leaving behind only embers. The beach, in this context, represents the landscape of lost passion, where the remnants of past joys serve as a poignant reminder of what once was.

A scene of tranquil beauty that serves as a canvas for exploring themes of nature, divinity, and human connection is presented in William Wordsworth's "It Is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free" (1807). The poem opens with a detailed observation of the evening landscape, establishing a distinctly pastoral atmosphere. The speaker meticulously paints a picture of serenity:

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea: [7].

The opening establishes a clear connection to Wordsworthian pantheism, where the divine is immanent within the natural world, yet, as Curran notes, "nature always wins out in the contest with art." [8]. Wordsworth's poem finds solace and inspiration in nature. The speaker's physical location on the French shore, looking back toward England, adds a layer of complexity. He is torn between earthly desires, represented by his relationship with Annette Vallon in France, and the pull of home and duty in England. This internal conflict sets the stage for the epiphany that follows. The poem's tranquility is momentarily disrupted, yet ultimately enhanced, by the sound of the waves:

Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly [7].

The sudden exclamation "Listen!" signals a shift in the speaker's perception. The quiet contemplation is replaced by a recognition of the dynamic power of nature. The waves become a symbol of the active, ever-present power of God in the world. However, Wordsworth does not stop at a purely personal experience. The speaker then turns his attention to his companion, his daughter Caroline:

Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouch'd by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine: [7].

Here, Wordsworth addresses his daughter, which reflects the Romantic idealization of childhood, which is unburdened by the complexities and doubts of adulthood. Her very presence enhances his own experience.

Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worship's at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not [7].

These lines further emphasize the child's innate spirituality. The poem concludes with a reaffirmation of the unity of nature and divine inspiration. Wordsworth proposes subtly that the beach is a space where the speaker can contemplate both earthly love and spiritual connection, finding harmony in the natural world and the unspoiled innocence of his daughter. In essence, the poem is a celebration of the beauty and inherent divinity of the natural world. The beach, therefore, becomes a sacred space, where the speaker finds solace, inspiration, and a deeper understanding of himself and the world.

Beach poetry at its finest is represented in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." It is a counterpoint to Wordsworth's romantic and religious sensitivity. While Wordsworth appears optimistic and enthusiastic, Arnold famously provides a melancholic view of the beach. However, the poem opens with a similarly tranquil atmosphere:

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits—on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay [9].

Despite this initial serenity, Arnold's experience differs significantly from Wordsworth's. The speaker is not physically present on the beach but is inside a room with his newlywed bride, observing the scene through a window. Despite this distance, Arnold shares Wordsworth's ability to capture the sounds of the sea meeting the beach:

Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in [9].

The sound of pebbles evokes sadness, and Miller claims that "in the poem the sense of melancholy presses on the reader with an almost deadening pall" [10]. Simultaneously, the pebble sound onomatopoeically evokes "eternal note of sadness" and it also reflects the decline in religious faith and the Victorian distrust of the Church as an institution:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar [9].

As the "Sea of Faith" recedes, Arnold offers a counterweight in the form of true love, as mediated in the closing lines:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night [9].

In contrast to Wordsworth's pantheistic optimism, Arnold's "Dover Beach" presents a stark vision of a world where faith has eroded, leaving humanity vulnerable and alone. In addition, Richter and Kluwick point out that for the Victorians, "the beach functions as a pedagogical space: through its sensual pleasures, the visitor is ideally induced to look beyond the ephemeral to the eternal. Paradoxically, the invigorating, relaxing and educational effects of a visit to the beach ultimately derive their impact from an awareness of the futility of human striving induced by observing the inexorable movement of the tides" [1]. While the setting is initially tranquil, it quickly gives way to an exploration of doubt, uncertainty, and the importance of human connection in a world defined by chaos. The harsh reality of the present day is compared to the true emotional love between the partners. Such a bond is the only hope that remains.

Using the beach as a metaphorical space where contrasting outlooks intersect is to be witnessed in Robert Graves's poem "The Beach" (1957). It explores the dichotomy between childhood innocence and the more jaded perspective of adulthood. The poem juxtaposes the carefree joy of children playing in the ocean with the somber wisdom of a seasoned boatman, creating a layered meditation on life's progression from innocence to experience. The poem begins by vividly capturing the jubilant energy of children at play. They scream "louder than gulls" as their fathers toss them into the "jovial foam" [11], and others rush fearlessly into the water, laughing as they spit out salty water. This imagery portrays the children's untainted delight and their fearless engagement with the natural world. The beach, for them, is a place of pure enjoyment, untouched by deeper concerns or complexities. In stark contrast, Graves introduces the figure of the "horny boatman" [11], whose presence shifts the tone of the poem. The boatman, described as having traveled far and wide across oceans, embodies experience and knowledge gained through exposure to life's harsher realities. He has seen whales and flying fish, sailed to distant lands like Demerara and the Ivory Coast, and accumulated stories that fascinate the children who crowd around him. However, his tales are tinged with a sense of disillusionment. He warns that "every ocean smells of tar" [11], a metaphor for the less romanticized truths of life that come with age and experience. The boatman's perspective contrasts sharply with that of the children; while they see only beauty and excitement in their surroundings, he perceives traces of hardship and decay. This contrast between the children and the boatman reflects broader themes about the journey from innocence to maturity. As Kluwick and Richter show, "The beach is often represented as a contact zone where incongruent social elements meet and mix" [1]. The children represent those who are just beginning to explore life, still shielded from its complexities and challenges. In

contrast, the boatman's wisdom comes at a cost—his understanding of life's realities has stripped away some of its initial wonder. Thus, Graves uses the ocean as a central metaphor for life. For the children, it is a playground; for the boatman, it is a repository of memories and experiences, both wondrous and grim. The beach serves as an intermediary space where these perspectives meet—a liminal zone between land (stability) and sea (the unknown). Therefore, "The Beach" is a poignant reflection on how our understanding of life evolves over time.

3. Caribbean reimaginings of beaches and sea

The context of Caribbean cultural production, tourism, and postcolonial identities is well discussed by Shalini Puri. In her book *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (2004) [12], she examines how the beach, often romanticized as an idyllic space in colonial and touristic imaginaries, is also a contested site where histories of slavery, labor, and environmental exploitation converge. Puri critiques the ways in which beaches are commodified under global capitalism, transforming them into spaces of exclusion where local populations are often displaced in favor of tourist economies. Additionally, she explores how Caribbean literature and visual culture reclaim the beach as a space of resistance, memory, and identity formation, challenging its reductive representation as a site of leisure and escape. She postulates that the Caribbean and the discourses about it should be seen as "different discourse of cultural hybridity [that] have functioned as strategies for constructing, deconstructing, and reconfiguring trans/national imaginaries" [12].

The comparison between the British perception of beaches and that in the Caribbean highlights a profound difference in how these environments are viewed culturally and historically. Whereas in Britain beaches are frequently depicted as serene landscapes that evoke feelings of peace and rejuvenation, and they are often seen as idyllic settings for leisure and relaxation, symbolizing tranquility and natural beauty, in contrast, the Caribbean perception of beaches is more complex due to its historical context. On one hand, the sea can be seen as a calming element, providing a sense of serenity similar to its British counterpart. However, this tranquility is juxtaposed with a darker historical narrative. The sea in the Caribbean is also heavily associated with the triangular slave trade—a system that forcibly transported millions of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean during what became known as the Middle Passage. The memory of these events embeds a layer of ambiguity into how many people perceive these coastal areas.

Probably the most celebrated Caribbean poet, born on Saint Lucia island, Derek Walcott often explores the complex interplay between natural landscapes, historical narratives, and personal identity. Baugh points out that "there is really no denial of the past in Walcott. He has returned again and again to recognition of what survived, and more substantially so in his later work. His work is instinct with a sense of the past" [13]. In his poem "The Almond Trees," the beach serves as a backdrop for reflecting on colonial history and its enduring impact on Caribbean culture. The poem begins with the line "There's nothing here" [14], echoing V.S. Naipaul's notion that the West Indies lacks indigenous history [14] due to its complex past of imported and mingled

populations designed to suppress rebellion. This absence of visible history is underscored by the description of “cold sand—/cold churning ocean, the Atlantic, /no visible history” [13]. Instead of purifying or rejuvenating effects typically associated with water, it brings an uncompassionate chill. Walcott juxtaposes this backdrop with twisted and coppery almond trees that symbolize slavery—bent bodies shining like copper in sharp sunlight as they are described as “shining in sweat” [13]. Baugh highlights that “[i]n ‘The Almond Trees,’ [Walcott uses] the trees as symbols of ancestral slave mothers, he spoke of ‘their leaves’ broad dialect [as] a coarse, /enduring sound/they shared together” [12]. Apart from the tree symbolism, the Caribbean creole is cherished here as being a signifier of the Caribbean identity. In his Nobel Prize lecture, Walcott testifies to it: “I stand here... in the name of the dialect they exchange like the leaves of the trees whose names are suppler, greener, more morning-stirred than English” [14]. In the poem itself, the trees contrast with a fisherman and sunbathing girls whose elongated shapes captivate the sun as they toast their flesh in modern attire reminiscent of ancient goddesses but distinctly brown-skinned: “until their lengthened shapes amaze the sun... this further shore of Africa is strewn/with the forked limbs of girls toasting their flesh/in scarves, sunglasses, Pompeian bikinis” [13]. These girls are likened to ancient figures—“brown daphnes, laurels” [13]—yet dressed in modern attire suggesting both cultural heritage and historical displacement within a context where catastrophe looms beneath beauty: “they’ll all have like their originals, their sacred grove” [13]. This imagery highlights how even idyllic scenes can be intertwined with painful historical narratives. In this context, Puri points out that

[t]he Caribbean [was the] first sight of European colonization. [thus] the Caribbean has some of the earliest and richest elaborations of cultural hybridity ... whose culture was forged in the crucible of colonialism and slavery from what Derek Walcott has called a “shipwreck of fragments.”... [Therefore], the Caribbean has had to negotiate its identities in relation to Native America; to Africa and Asia, from where most of its surviving inhabitants came, to Europe, from where its colonizing settlers came, and to the United States of America, its imperial neighbor [4].

Slavery was often associated with whipping and burning various signs on the bodies of the slaves. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the poem further explores the above-mentioned themes through fire imagery—singd trunks (“the fierce acetylene air has singd/their writing trunks” [13]), seared skin (“it’ll sear a pale skin copper” [13]), and white-hot ash underfoot—but neither water nor fire achieves purification or rebirth. These images reinforce colonial brutality and resilience within Caribbean identity.

Walcott masterfully weaves together personal memory, historical conflict, and the enduring impact of war on both the natural world and human consciousness in “Beachhead.” The poem is set against the backdrop of a beach, where the speaker navigates a landscape that is both serene and haunted by memories of World War II battles. The poem begins with an “ancestral quarrel/of fresh water with salt” [13], symbolizing ancient conflicts that shape the landscape. This dynamic environment sets the stage for exploring how natural beauty coexists with historical violence. Images like coconuts compared to helmets from marine units evoke memories of war, linking

past conflicts to present landscapes. The beach serves as a metaphor for how history embeds itself in natural elements while affecting personal experiences deeply. References to Guadalcanal and Guam underscore these historical themes, highlighting once-strategic locations now overgrown but still carrying remnants of past significance. The psychological impact of these embedded memories is vividly portrayed through imagery where snipers are imagined in one's hair. The internalized tension reflects Walcott's nuanced exploration into how personal experiences are intertwined with broader historical narratives. Furthermore, Walcott contrasts peaceful landscapes (e.g., yellow dwarf palms) with violent rhetoric associated with war ("thank heaven that rhetoric/all wars must be fought in") [13]. This juxtaposition highlights the dissonance between nature's serenity and humanity's destructive tendencies. Despite these tensions, nature participates in memorialization by erasing past traces ("the surf smooths a fresh cenotaph") [13]. As a consequence, "Beachhead" offers a profound reflection on memory, history, violence, and peace. In both poems, Walcott illustrates how beaches serve not just as serene settings but also as sites imbued with complex meanings—both peaceful retreats and reminders of tragic histories shaped by colonialism or war. His poetry underscores that understanding differing perspectives provides insight into how history shapes not just our perceptions but also our broader cultural identities. In Huxley's view, the beach calls for close observation since it offers evidence of the ways in which nature works, both in a synchronic and in a diachronic sense [15]. Therefore, the beach as depicted in Walcott's poetry highlights that even idyllic landscapes can embody both serenity and brutality simultaneously.

A seaside British setting that contrasts sharply with the complex historical narratives found in Derek Walcott's Caribbean landscapes is presented in Philip Larkin's poem "To the Sea". While Walcott explores themes of colonialism and identity, Larkin focuses on personal isolation and societal change. Larkin describes a nostalgic scene of childhood summers: "The miniature gaiety of seashores... steep beach, blue water, towels, red bathing caps, / The small hushed waves' repeated fresh collapse / Up the warm yellow sand" [16]. This idyllic portrayal is juxtaposed with his own preference for solitude: "As when, happy at being on my own." Larkin's use of imagery highlights both the beauty and decay of modern life. He notes how everything "crowds under the low horizon" [16], creating a sense of confinement despite being outdoors [16]. The shift from cherished memories to contemporary neglect reflects Larkin's pessimistic view on modern society. In describing his return to this familiar place, Larkin states that it "brings sharply back something known long before" [16]. However, this nostalgia is tinged with melancholy as he observes how things have changed: "The white steamer has gone. Like breathed-on glass / The sunlight has turned milky" [16]. This imagery suggests not just physical deterioration but also an emotional disconnection from past joys—a reflection of how modern life can lead to feelings of isolation. The white steamer is a significant element in the narrative, symbolizing both change and nostalgia. Racz emphasizes that "the white steamer... forms a poignant contrast with the colours of the beach, transforms time into space" [17]. The line "The white steamer has gone" [16] marks a transition from past memories to present realities, highlighting how things have altered over time. The steamer's absence also underscores Larkin's theme of isolation and societal change.

By noting its disappearance, he reflects on how even seemingly permanent aspects of life can vanish, leaving behind only memories and a sense of longing. This sentiment aligns with his broader critique of modernity and its effects on human connection. Furthermore, the image of “A white steamer stuck in the afternoon” [16] initially suggests stagnation or being trapped—a feeling that resonates with Larkin’s portrayal of personal solitude amidst societal flux. By using a beach—a place typically associated with communal leisure—Larkin emphasizes how even in spaces meant for shared enjoyment, individuals can feel disconnected from others around them. However, Racz maintains that “the idyll of privacy always turns out to be a failure or mere illusion in Larkin’s poetry. In some poems he tries to retreat from it into the idyll of an idealized community (“To the Sea, ...), but even such communities cannot change the ultimate absurdity of human existence” [16]. Larkin’s happiness in solitude—“happy at being on my own” [16]—highlights a desire for personal space amidst crowded scenes like those at beaches. Moreover, it suggests that people often find themselves more isolated than connected to their surroundings or each other—a condition reflecting broader societal issues where individuals feel disconnected despite being surrounded by others. In “To the Sea,” the beach’s deterioration serves as a metaphor for the human experience of loneliness and societal disconnection. Larkin’s use of imagery also captures spiritual angst within Britain’s post-war landscape. His ability to find meaning in seemingly mundane settings like beaches reflects a capacity to highlight deeper human concerns through everyday imagery.

An interesting Caribbean manifestation of the significance of the beach can be found in the poetry by Olive Senior. She is a celebrated Jamaican poet and writer whose works delve deeply into themes of identity, nature, and the cultural experiences of the Caribbean. Her poetry often reimagines the natural world as a lens through which to explore the historical and social realities of the region, addressing issues such as colonialism, resilience, and community life. Senior’s ability to intertwine personal and collective narratives has made her a prominent voice in postcolonial literature, as she captures the essence of Caribbean identity while reflecting on its historical complexities. Simultaneously, her work often depicts themes related to environmental degradation and cultural heritage, making her critique on modernity’s impact particularly relevant. Through its exploration of lost solitude and disappearing beauty tied specifically to coastal landscapes like beaches, her poetry resonates with universal concerns about change and loss while also addressing unique Caribbean perspectives on nature as intertwined with history. In the poem “Dead Straight,” several elements evoke a sense of melancholy similar to Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach.” Both poems lament the loss of natural beauty due to human intervention. In “Dead Straight,” this is evident in lines like “Not a glimmer of the coastline as I try to make it home/to you through forests of hotels as thick as thieves” [17], highlighting how development obscures once cherished views. The speaker expresses disillusionment with modern changes, symbolized by the transformation from scenic routes to monotonous highways, “my road map’s creased and torn along dead straight lines” [17]. This mirrors Arnold’s depiction of an increasingly industrialized world where peace is lost. In Robert Young’s view, Arnold represents the nineteenth-century literary and cultural discourses of “Englishness” at its best [18]. The imagery used in both poems serves as powerful symbols because both poems convey desolation and emptiness. The closing

line in “Dead Straight,” “And endless empty space is not inviting,” [19] echoes Arnold’s description of hearing the melancholy of the “long withdrawing roar/Of the Sea” [9] amidst industrialization. Additionally, both poems express a longing for solitude and tranquility that has been disrupted by modern changes. In “Dead Straight,” this is reflected in the speaker’s inability to find solace in altered landscapes, echoing Arnold’s lamentation over lost serenity.

Furthermore, a second theme resonating in “Dead Straight” is the displacement of Caribbean immigrants. The poem portrays a return home tainted by the realization that natural landscapes have been irreparably altered, stirring emotions reminiscent of those felt by Caribbean immigrants who frequently encounter a changed homeland upon their return. This change can symbolize the disconnection from one’s roots and cultural identity, mirroring the sense of not fully belonging to the society of their new countries of residence. In this context, the beach becomes a significant littoral space. Caribbean immigrants often experience cultural displacement as they navigate multiple cultures while maintaining ties to their original homeland. Both Caribbean immigrants and the speaker in “Dead Straight” yearn for solitude and natural beauty that is lost or inaccessible due to urbanization or migration. It mirrors the identity crisis faced by many Caribbean immigrants who must reconcile past identities with present realities. In addition, Senior’s use of language in “Dead Straight” enhances the emotional impact of displacement through vivid imagery that conveys the transformation of landscapes, such as “my road map’s creased and torn along dead straight lines” [19] and “forests of hotels as thick as thieves” [19]. These images symbolize not only physical changes but also a loss of character and charm, evoking feelings of melancholy and disillusionment. By using metaphors like comparing hotels to forests, Senior creates powerful visual contrasts that highlight how natural beauty, also of the beach areas, is obscured by development. The tone is melancholic, reflecting a sense of desolation, “And endless empty space is not inviting” [19], which aligns with themes found in other works addressing displacement, such as Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach.” This shared melancholy mood enhances the poem’s emotional impact by evoking universal feelings about change and loss.

In the Caribbean, the poets inevitably link the sea and beach in particular with slavery. On the one hand, the ocean has witnessed the Middle Passage; on the other hand, it is the connecting media to the homeland in Africa. A significant figure in Caribbean oral poetry and performance, Jean Binta Breeze uses her work to explore the complexities of identity and displacement within the Caribbean diaspora. Her performances and recordings give voice to the experiences of Caribbean women, addressing themes of migration, cultural memory, and the challenges of navigating multiple cultural landscapes. Through her dub poetry and storytelling, Breeze creates a powerful connection to the rhythms and realities of Caribbean life, resonating with diasporic communities seeking to maintain their cultural heritage while forging new identities abroad. She, in her “Ilands”, proclaims, “I felt the gods would hear... I’m here I know under this ocean we hold hands we will meet on distant shores” [20]. Although this is not to happen yet, there is some hope.

In contrast to some other Caribbean poets who might view beaches as liminal spaces between cultures or identities, John Agard’s work tends more towards exploring historical narratives tied to these environments rather than their physical

beauty or tranquility alone. Having been born in British Guyana, his poetry frequently confronts the legacy of slavery, challenging conventional historical narratives and amplifying marginalized voices. He uses wit, satire, and dramatic monologue to explore the psychological and emotional impact of enslavement on both the enslaved and the enslavers. Agard's work serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring presence of slavery in contemporary society, urging readers to critically examine its ongoing effects on race, identity, and power dynamics. The slavery bondage and the yoke of slavery are fully expressed in "Atlantic Libation". At the outset, the speaker asks, "What light can your green darkness, Atlantic, /shed on a traffic that has scarred your waters?" [21]. The Atlantic, as the witness of the cruelty of the triangular traffic, is here understood in the mythological sense and within the imaginative frame of the African and Caribbean ancestors. "Since water, according to the native Indians, is not without a feeling," the ocean is urged to "Speak, Atlantic, Or are you history's silent accomplice?" [21]. However, in spite of the horrors of the past, Agard ends on a positive note, hoping that the beach and the sea will be "weaving dreams from my tainted cloth to embody the fabric for the future" [21]. Hope for the future as well as an escape from the harsh reality of the present and the gloomy past is dreaming. This strategy is exercised in John Agard's "On the Waters", where the speaker in a dream becomes one with a ship that is effortlessly sailing on a calm sea, bringing the speaker into a land of no sorrows. "Asleep, your body is a ship/bound for dreamland" [22]. The ocean serves as a symbol for both suffering and resilience in the face of colonialism. Agard's work often juxtaposes past hardships with present hopes for renewal. For example, he suggests that despite the horrors of slavery, there is hope for weaving dreams from tainted pasts into fabrics for future possibilities. This approach reflects a broader Caribbean perspective on beaches not just as leisure spaces but also as sites of historical memory and cultural identity. Moreover, Agard's poetry frequently employs Caribbean dialects and cultural references to reinforce his heritage. Similarly to Breeze and Senior, his use of language emphasizes connections between personal experiences and collective histories that are central to understanding Caribbean identities. Agard's metaphors involving beaches or seas reflect his experiences in exile by exploring the theme of displacement. As an Anglophone Caribbean writer living in exile himself, Agard's work often compares domestic Caribbean experiences with those in new countries of residence. The beach serves as a liminal space—a gateway from old homes to new ones—where he meditates on diaspora by contrasting homeland memories with current realities.

While John Agard addresses the historical realities of slavery, Grace Nichols explores its lingering effects on the subconscious, charting a contemporary strategy of diasporic departure from the "new" Caribbean homeland. Her poetry serves as a pivotal exploration of the Caribbean diaspora, capturing the complexities of identity, culture, and belonging through her unique blend of Caribbean rhythms and British experiences. Her work, such as in *I is a Long-Memored Woman* and *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*, challenges traditional narratives by redefining Black female subjectivities and resisting colonial and patriarchal structures. Nichols' use of Creole alongside Standard English not only reflects the cultural diversity of the Caribbean but also acts as an act of spiritual survival, preserving the oral traditions and folk tales of her homeland while navigating the multicultural landscape of Britain. Nichols' poetry

frequently addresses transatlantic connections and cultural identities tied to both her native British Guyana and adopted Britain. Her work incorporates elements from folklore and fables of her Caribbean homeland, which might include references to coastal environments or seas as part of broader cultural narratives. Although specific beach names are not mentioned in her poems, these themes resonate deeply, reflecting on how natural landscapes influence personal experiences across different cultures. In her poetry, the beach serves as a metaphor for several purposes, particularly in “Like an Heiress.” Here, the beach is not just a physical location but a symbolic space that contrasts past memories with present realities. The poem begins by evoking a deep emotional connection to the Atlantic Ocean, described as an inheritance and a mirror reflecting her childhood, “oceanic small-days” [23]. However, this nostalgic reflection is disrupted by the sight of pollution on the beach—used car tires, plastic bottles, and Styrofoam cups—highlighting environmental degradation and irresponsibility and human disconnection from nature. The beach metaphorically represents both beauty and desolation. On one hand, it symbolizes natural beauty and personal heritage; on the other hand, it reflects societal neglect through pollution. This contrast underscores themes of modernity versus nature and highlights how human actions impact environments once cherished for their tranquility. By describing herself as feeling like a tourist returning to an air-conditioned hotel room after visiting this polluted site, she emphasizes how modern comforts can shield us from confronting our impact on nature.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, while both regions, i.e., the United Kingdom and the Caribbean, appreciate natural beauty, their perceptions diverge significantly due to distinct cultural histories. When comparing and contrasting British and Caribbean tradition, one might observe that whereas the British build upon their own tradition and intertextualize classical literature, Caribbean writers can build upon a larger corpus: they have the classical British as well as the domestic West Indian tradition that they intertwine in their works. The beach proves to be a very strong inspiration that nourishes the imagination of poets on both ends of the Atlantic Ocean. They transform and internalize it in order to create the sublime. The beach is at the same time considered a liminal space between the mainland and the sea, and metaphorically speaking, it stands for the center and the periphery. There is a dynamic relationship between these two spheres, which propels beach poetry.

Moreover, the beach, as explored through the diverse poetic sensibilities of Spenser, Moore, Wordsworth, and Arnold, evolves far beyond a mere geographical location. It becomes a powerful and versatile symbol within the Anglophone literary landscape. These poets, through their distinct perspectives, transform the beach into a space where profound human experiences are enacted and reflected. From the Renaissance exploration of love, loss, and the search for faith to the Victorian anxieties surrounding religious decline and existential uncertainty, the beach serves as a critical threshold. It represents the liminal space between stability and change, the known and the unknown, the earthly and the divine. Whether portraying the transient nature of human endeavors, echoing the pain of lost passions, providing a connection to nature’s

inherent spirituality, or embodying a desolate terrain of existential struggle, the beach becomes a mirror reflecting humanity's continuous engagement with both the beauty and the burden of existence. Ultimately, these poets collectively illustrate the beach's unique ability to encapsulate and mediate the profound anxieties, hopes, and transformative moments that shape individuals and cultures inextricably bound to the rhythm and reach of the sea.

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