CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean island is the group of islands and seas to the North of South America and to the east of Mexico. Around 4000 BC the nomadic hunters, Arawaks, arrived on the island. Arawak is a group of people from the Amerindian, from the Orinoco River Delta around Venezuela and Guyana. They moved from the north to the east and began the tradition of island-hopping. The Arawaks were happily farming and fishing on the island. Around 1200 AD Caribs from South America captured the island. They killed the Arawaks men and enslaved the women. They drove the Arawaks as far west as Cuba and as far north as the Bahamas. Little of Arawaks culture survived as they had no written language (Hanratty).

Christopher Columbus along with the European explorers explored the Caribbean region. He made his first landfall at San Salvador in the Bahamas on October 12, 1492. He first settled in Hispaniola, today shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Finding out new lands gives glory, but what Columbus and subsequent explorers wanted was gold. Despite his four trips, he never found much gold, but the soil was fertile and the sea was bountiful. The conquistadors exploited the island violently. The Spanish explorers focussed on the big islands for high yields, so they grabbed the land, pillaged, enslaved and established towns in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Jamaica. The mineral rich Trinidad was captured by the Spanish. The Eastern Caribbean, from Barbados, Nevis, Antigua and Montserrat up to St Kits was taken by the British in 1623. The French settled in Martinique and Guadeloupe, and the Dutch claimed Saba, Sint Eustatius and St-Martin/Sint Maarten. For the following two hundred years, these colonial powers
fought like children and these islands changed hands. There developed a hybridized culture in these islands and some islands like St-Martín/Sint Maarten and St Kitts, split between two colonial powers (Hanratty).

The Caribbean island is a giant agricultural land. The greedy colonial power’s major interest was farming, mainly sugar, tobacco and bananas. This fueled slavery and promoted struggle between the land owners and the politicians. The Bahamas provided a perfect spot for the sea robbers, with hundreds of cays, complex shoals and channels. The island like, Santo Domingo’s Fortaleza Ozama, the fortresses of Old San Juan and Havana attracted the travellers. The Eastern Caribbean was controlled by the European overseers. The other part of the island faced colonial infighting, local plotting, rebellion and independence. Haiti declared its independence in 1804, the Dominican Republic in 1844 and Cuba in 1902. Smaller islands like St Vincent, the Grenadines, Barbuda and Antigua banded together. The French islands like St-Barthelemy, Martinique and Guadeloupe maintained strong ties to their parent country and Puerto Rico established a commonwealth relation with the United States. Puerto Rico often debated between statehood and independence and held its independence after statehood narrowly losing plebiscites in 1993 and 1998. In 1954, the Dutch holdings of Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius and Saba became an autonomous federation under Dutch rule known as the Netherlands Antilles. Later Aruba split first in 1986, and others are doing that now. For the past hundred years, these islands faced many problems and drastic political changes. Geopolitically, the United States intervention in the Caribbean islands was important. Moreover, these islands were at the mercy of heavy weather and market fluctuations and polarized between the rich landlords and poor workers. Economic instability fostered socialist tendencies including Fidel Castro and Maurice Bishop in Grenada,
and the rise of dictators like Rafael Leonidas Trujillo for 31 years in the Dominican Republic and the Duvaliers for 29 years in Haiti (Hanratty).

The failure in agriculture collapsed the economy of the Caribbean island. Tourism gave them hand to improve their economy. The people of these islands faced the havoc and social woes of tourism, like prostitution in Cuba. The Caribbean island depended on tourism for their source of jobs, business and revenues. The people of Trinidad and Barbados overwhelmingly supported tourism as it made everybody's life better (Hanratty). Caryl Phillips pictures the Caribbean island as:

The Caribbean is an artificial society created by the massacre of its inhabitants, the Carib and Arawak Indians. It is where Africa met Europe on somebody else soil. This history of the Caribbean is a bloody history. It is a history which is older than the history of the United States. Columbus didn’t arrive in the United States. He arrived in the Caribbean. The Caribbean is Marquez’ territory. The Caribbean belongs both to Africa and Europe. (qtd. in Schatteman 17)

The European presence, in the Caribbean mostly, is motivated by selfish economic considerations. The Europeans followed all inhumane ways to obtain replaceable labour for their plantation. West Indies is an artificially created society because the inhabitants of the Caribbeans are either migrated or forcibly transported there. “With this conglomeration of people of different races and religious beliefs and with different motives of being in the Caribbean, it was difficult to create a common Caribbean ethos, especially, given the fundamental inequalities created by the institution of slavery” (Udofia 56). Columbus brought Spanish cereals, vegetables, fruits and sugar cane to the West Indies, during his second trip to the Caribbean in
1493. So West Indies is regarded as a group of imported people in a mostly imported environment (Udofia 56-61). “The sole purpose of the imperialists in the Caribbean was to exploit the natural, mineral and agricultural resources of the area, both for personal benefits and the good of their various mother countries” (Udofia 56).

The history of the Caribbean is peculiar. It neither evolves gradually nor naturally. Without any archaeological and mythological past, the history of the Caribbean begins abruptly with the discovery of the Bahamas in 1492 by Christopher Columbus. Historians like Eric Williams and literary artist like V.S. Naipaul assert, “The Caribbean is merely a geographical expression which lacks a noteworthy history” (qtd. in Udofia 56). V.S. Naipaul in A Flag on the Island says, “History is built on creation and achievement, and nothing was created in the West Indies” (39). He also claims, “The West Indies is a sterile, static, manufactured society due to the accidental nature of its discovery and the brutal mode of occupation and violence among the colonizing forces” (qtd. in Udofia 56). Like V.S. Naipaul many Caribbean scholars concluded that the country is history less.

The Spanish system of slavery made easy for the Spaniards to procure labour for their mines and plantations. Aboriginal Indians, white slaves and convicts, were the source of labour for the Europeans before the African slaves were brought to the West Indies. On September 3rd, 1501, the King of Spain initiated the Negro slavery. He was the first to transport Christian Negro slaves from Spain to the West Indies. Shortly afterwards, the African slave trade began. The mining of gold and cultivation of sugar led, to the institutionalization of slavery, in the West Indies. Plantation slavery began in the 16th century. Moreover, the price of sugar influenced the fortune of the islands. Cultivation of cane was highly capital-and-labour intensive. Manufacturing sugar was an arduous process. On the economic scale, production of
sugar required financial outlay and a large cheap labour force. Negro slavery, provided an easily available and replaceable unskilled labour, and this led to a change in the racial composition and social structure of the Islands (Udofia 56-62).

Under slavery, the humanity of the blacks’ were eroded, particularly with the arduous work hours, stringent penalties for absenteeism and the circulation of slave codes, which gave legal sanction to slavery. These codes deprived the slaves of the freedom of movement. For instance, they could not marry without their masters’ permission, could not own property, considered as a moveable property and could be punished even unto death by their superiors. This brutally indifferent method of slavery gave rise to such psychological traumas as alienation, rootlessness, inferiority complex and the creation of the colonial mentality. By the 19th century, the cultivation of sugar in the British and French West Indian colonies was no longer economical. Cheaper sugar was obtainable from India and Brazil. The cost of sugar production was greater than its selling price (Udofia 56-62). Plantation owners could not make a profit after caring the slaves.

Politically, the abolitionist movement was part of the increasing global move by the industrial bourgeoisie against the landed aristocracy, such as the French revolution of 1789 and the victory of the North over the South in the American civil war. On humanitarian grounds, slavery considered the pinnacle of man’s inhumanity to man and so, such figures as William Wilberforce sought the legal end of the institution of slavery. Abolition Acts passed in Denmark in 1803, Great Britain in 1807, France in 1817 and Holland in 1818 while slavery legally abolished in the British colonies in 1833, French colonies in 1848, and Dutch colonies in 1863. (Udofia 56-60)
In the lives of the slaves, there were no immediate fundamental changes after the post-emancipation period. They preferred farming and nomadic life than to work long hours for meagre wages. This vacuum in the labour force was filled by the migration of indentured Indian labourers to the West Indies and nearly half a million Indians migrated to the Caribbean. This introduced a new racial, linguistic and cultural complication into the already diversified West Indian society. Thus the Caribbean became a deterministic society where the social status is predicated on skin pigmentation and people divided into exclusive water-tight colour compartments. This situation intensified the psychosis nurtured by a sense of racial and cultural void or inferiority which began with the slavery (Udofia 56-62). Caryl Phillips in *Cambridge* has mentioned the differentiation of the labourers by their skin colour. Emily says:

I was now instructed on the questions of colour. It appears that there are many shades of black, some which signify a greater social acceptability than others. My host informed me that there were other persons who could give fuller and more authoritative instruction in this matter, but generally speaking, the lighter shade of black, the nearer to salvation and acceptability was the negro. A milkier hue signified some form of white blood, and it should be clear to even the most egalitarian observer that the more white blood flowing in a person’s veins, the less barbarous will be his social tendencies. (Cam 25)

In the early colonial period, education was designed to instruct basic reading, writing and moral instructions to the blacks. Later, the blacks were taught foreign history, musical traditions and the value system of the metropolis. Some blacks accepted the foreign values neglecting their racial roots, whereas some blacks rejected the Western values and had a nostalgic attachment to their folk tradition or blend of
both cultures. This situation gave rise to the creation of a plural society. Even after the post-emancipation, the West Indies was strongly under foreign domination. A complex situation existed in the Caribbean by the existence and interlacing of two different sets of cultural values. The foreign derived metropolitan culture was followed among the upper and middle classes and the black Creole culture contained many African-derived elements and was practised by the lower classes. Thus, the various social classes act and think differently, and one class elevated and aspired towards, to the detriment of the other. The upper and middle classes speak Standard English, contract legal marriages and practise the religion and culture of their former European masters. The lower classes speak the Creole dialect, and engage in fetish practices such as the worship of Gods like Shango, gold, and Ifa and usually do not contract legal marriages (Udofia 56-62).

For many centuries the European culture and style dominated the world and literature. The Caribbean literature is also ruled by the European culture. From the fifteenth century to the mid eighteenth century the autobiographies and poetry of the slaves dominated the Caribbean literature and were published in many languages like English, French and Spanish. The modern Caribbean literature drifted away from the slave autobiography to black cultures. In the 20th century, the life of blacks in the Caribbean changed drastically, and the same change found in the writers, they handled the social themes in their writings. The culture and writings differed distinctly in the English, French and Spanish speaking island. Mythology from the Native Americans and Africa plays an important role in the Caribbean literature. In the recent years, African tradition and rhythms, like jazz and blues music are the dominating theme in the anglophone Caribbean literature. The French island writers’ common subject matters are black and creole cultural identity (Udofia 56-61).
The Caribbean has, therefore, been described as a plural society made up of people who displayed different modes of behaviour and held together by economic reasons, rather than by a sense of belonging to a common culture. The divisive unity was the result of different responses and modes of adjustment to the void created by dispossession. The slave ancestors were dispossessed of their motherlands and forced to live in an alien and hostile milieu in which they made racially and culturally inferior. This deep-seated sense of inferiority and lack of confidence became intensified by the focus of colonial education, which encouraged further amnesia and shame, about the African past and pushed the blacks towards accepting Europe, as well. There have, therefore, been various literary responses to the realities of the Caribbean historical experience. Some writers, especially, white West Indian writers are apologetic about this history. Some reject the West Indies and claim Africa as their spiritual home while others reject the concept of Africa and take their cues from Europe. The various writers also have different concepts about West Indian history. In Caribbean literature, there is the predominance of the alienation theme in various forms: homelessness, rootlessness and exile (Udofia 56-62).

The primary cultural commitment of Caribbean writers remains in the search for identity and self-discovery. George Lamming describes this situation as paradoxical since it insists on roots and rootlessness; home and homelessness at the same time. The fragmented nature of the society gives the West Indian an acute sense of exile, and because the literature of this area reflects and attempts to come to terms with the consequences of colonization, Edward Baugh describes it as “colonial literature”(13), Caribbean literature celebrates a new ethos and identity. It established the West Indian identity as different from the European, and neither is it African,
Chinese nor Indian but a strange and a pleasurable mixture of all these (Udofia 56-62).

The literature of the Caribbean is exceptional, both in language and subject. More than a million and a half Africans, along with many Indians and South Asians, brought to the Caribbean between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today, their descendants are active in literature and the arts, producing literature with strong and direct ties to traditional African expressions. This literary connection, combined with tales of survival, exile, resistance, endurance, and emigration to other parts of the Americas, makes for a body of work that is essential for the study of the Caribbean and the Black Diaspora – and indeed central to understand of the New World. (Arnold 65)

Caribbean literature has often been jaundiced. Rose Acholonu observes “the dehumanizing influence of colonization... is as damaging as it is permanent” (78). The Caribbean man cannot live down the problem of imposed acculturation. However, the Caribbean man can evolve a new image in the modern world out of past and present experiences and thus, transcend his alien environment. The emergence of Caribbean literature as distinct from European, African, Chinese or Indian literature is a step in the positive direction and shows that the West Indian has a future. As Derek Walcott points out, “history is not only that celebrated by ruins of castles and forts but is also the chronicle of the past of the common man and his deeds – the fisherman with his mongrel walking on the beach” (qtd. in Brodber 13). Creative history also accounts for the present and projects into the future. Walcott continues: “you who feel the pain of historylessness, look at the work patterns, the dances, the dreams, the songs and the memories of your forefathers, analyse these and you will be writing your history”
Walcott also advises that it is the duty of the West Indian to possess his land, tame and cultivate it and finally produce something original, for the West Indian “behind all his roles and faces, possesses the possibility of a rich, complex and an integrated self which is his by virtue of his exile” (qtd in Udofia). As Gerald Moore notes, “... even if the West Indians had created nothing else, they have certainly created people” (qtd in Udofia). Walcott insists that it would be abhorrent to him to say “I wish we were English again” or “I wish we were African again” that the reality is, “one has to build in the West Indies” (qtd in Udofia). Walcott's statement is justified when in 1992, he got the world's highest literary acclaim by winning the Nobel Prize for literature, a feat, which repeated by Naipaul a few years later. This, apart from being a reward and recognition of individual excellence, is also a celebration of Caribbean literature, and since literature is a celebration of life, the Nobel Prize indirectly proclaims and recognizes Caribbean life as valid and authentic. Quite contrary to claim that history exerts a definitive influence on the creative imagination, it is evident that the Caribbean man can live down the vagaries of history and transcend his alien milieu (Udofia 56-62).

Derek Walcott believes that the West Indian must move towards refashioning the present. The West Indian must overcome the sense of inferiority and lack of cohesion which is the heritage of dispossession and alienation. Walcott also tackles the issue of the West Indian loyalty to at least two cultures: one, indigenous, and the other, foreign. He maintains that for true nationalism to exist and for the authentic Caribbean personality to emerge, one cannot adopt one culture to the neglect of the other. Walcott consistently blends elements of the two cultures in his works and even attempts to re-evaluate certain aspects of colonial history. He is also of the belief that servitude to the muse of history can only result in the literature that is sociological,
self-pitying and full of revenge. To him, history is fiction which is subject to the vagaries of memory and thus, opens to misinterpretations or re-interpretations. He, therefore, ignores the claim that history exerts a definitive influence on the creative imagination and rather conceives of the New World Negro as an Adam who has suffered amnesia of the past and is, therefore, free to move forward in time and have a new life for himself in his New World (Udofia 56-62).

Edward Brathwaite, another writer from the Caribbean, however, sees the task of the Caribbean writer as being the rehabilitation of the colonial mind through making the West Indian accept folkways, music and orature and more importantly, shape these things into a concrete literary tradition from which other writers can draw inspiration. Brathwaite believes that if the black man rejects his racial memory, he will doom to endless migrations and rootlessness. He can neither define himself in terms of an attachment to Africa nor in terms of Europe which exploits and manipulates his life. He, therefore, suggests very strongly a recapitulation of the past, but according to him this might not be easy and will involve the excavation of painful memories. (Udofia 56-62). Often referred to as “the prophet of doom” (Richards. D 32), V.S. Naipaul sees the history of the Caribbean as a recurrent void characterized by brutality, sterility and lack of visible achievements. Naipaul says in The Middle Passage, “history built on creation and achievement and nothing created in the West Indies” (43). The direct opposite of Naipaul's vision is Samuel Selvon's. As a writer, “Selvon's historical sense informed by his optimistic vision of man's ability to transcend the drawbacks of a debilitating past, thus, referred to as the optimistic visionary ‘par excellence’” (Acholonu 87).

The terms ‘Caribbean’ and ‘West Indian’ are used interchangeably by many people in discussing the literature of this part of the world. However, ‘Caribbean’
embraces the literature in all the languages of the area – English, French, Spanish and Dutch - but by ‘West Indian’, meant only the writings of those Island and Mainland territories where English is the official language and the chief medium of literary composition. Literature in English specifically from the former British West Indies may be referred to as Anglo-Caribbean or, in historical contexts, West Indian literature. ‘Caribbean literature’ refers to the literature of all Caribbean territories regardless of language – whether written in English, Spanish, French or Dutch, or one of numerous creoles. The term ‘West Indies’ first began to achieve wide currency in the 1950s, when writers such as Samuel Selvon, John Hearne, Edgar Mittelholzer, V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming began to be published in the United Kingdom. West Indian literature ranges over subjects and themes as broad as those of any other ‘national’ literature, but in general many West Indian writers share a special concern with questions of identity, ethnicity, and language that arise out of the Caribbean historical experience (Irele 711-25).

The unique and pervasive characteristic of Caribbean literature is the use of dialect forms of the national language, often termed Creole. When Christopher Columbus first described the island of Guadeloupe to Queen Isabella in a recently discovered letter from January 1494, he wrote this inaugural text of French Caribbean literature not, of course, in French, nor in his native Genovese, nor even in the standard Spanish of the period. This, like all of Columbus’s surviving texts, wrote in Mediterranean, Creole scholars have termed “levantesque” (Columbus 13), a language forged on vessels in which sailors of many nationalities and languages forced to communicate in the microcosm of their ship. Writing in a mixture of Portuguese, Genovese, and Castilean, “the great navigator expressed himself correctly in no language” (Columbus 3). While not literally a text of francophone
Caribbean literature, Columbus’s letter is rather the first document of what Chamoiseau and Confiant have called a French Caribbean Creole Literature (Irele 711-25).

“Anglophone Caribbean literature is not only written in and about the region itself, but is an important presence within Canadian, US, and British literature, and less often, anglophone Caribbean writers have brought their particular visions to bear on cultures in Africa, India, the Middle East, and Australia” (De Boissiere 25). Anglophone Caribbean literature reflects the life of a diaspora. British literary works, such as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), established the importance of fiction in the West Indian colonies. Diaries of colonial wives, such as Lady Nugent and other British people who visited or lived in the West Indies and wrote out of their own cultural prejudices and knowledge, and the Caribbean writers provide the antithesis to these British writers. Despite pioneering works such as Becka’s *Buckra Baby* and Jamaican H.G. De Lisser’s *Jane’s Career* (1913), the tradition of the West Indian novel began in the 1930s with Jamaican Claude McKay’s *Banana Bottom* (1933), Trinidadian Alfred H. Mendes’s *Pitch Lake* (1934) and *Black Fauns* (1935), and Trinidadian C.L.R. James’s *Minty Alley* (1936). These novels explore the pressures on ordinary lives in a region where poverty and racism were common and colonialism still in place (Irele 735-58).

By the mid-century, Jamaican Roger Mais’s fiction continued this socially committed trend with *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1970). His contemporary, Mittelholzer, described by Gilkes “as being the first West Indian novelist to make central theme of plural racial inheritance as complicating divided loyalties, in *Corentyne Thunder* (1941)”(41). V.S. Reid’s *New Day* (1949) is an important fictional reading of Jamaican history between 1865 and the 1940s, including the

Harris has been an amazingly prolific novelist, establishing and exploring the very boundaries of self and identity by subverting fictional conventions of characterization in innovative, highly metaphorical ways that owe everything to his multi-ethnic Guyanese inheritance. Marshall’s novels explored the relation between the Caribbean and African America. Lamming’s complex political vision was to develop through several novels after the autobiographical *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953). In *The Emigrants* (1954); *Of Age and Innocence* (1958); *Season of Adventure* (1960); *Water with Berries* (1971); and *Natives of my Person* (1972), he fictionalized West Indian experience in Britain, return to the Caribbean, class tensions, and the construction of Africa within the Caribbean; the nature of political action and artistic commitment, and of human behaviour that inhibits or strengthens both (Irele 735-58).

Naipaul is also a very prolific writer, of fiction and travel narratives. *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) was a sign that the clever humour of his first three books of fiction namely: *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958) and *Miguel Street* (1959) are full realization of the humanity of an ordinary man in an indifferent colonial Trinidad. More recently Naipaul seems to have turned to explorations of himself in a British context. Francis Wyndham’s review of Naipaul’s *Guerillas* (1975)
sees beneath the controlled surface of the prose: “The manner controlled to the point of terseness, but the matter resounds like a cry of pain” (259). Samuel Selvon’s turn to London as the setting for *The Lonely Londoners* established a different but complementary vision and tone from the specifically Indo-Caribbean experience in his first novel, *A Brighter Sun* (1952). Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is seriously intertextual with Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, cleverly switching the emphasis from a young English woman’s struggles to the entire defeat of the hopes of her other, the madwoman in the attic (Irele 735-58).

Earl Lovelace published his first novel *While Gods Are Falling* in 1965. Lovelace explores tensions between country and city, the challenges of being a man in a world where hard-won traditions are under threat. Lovelace’s sense of humour and his acute portrayals of Trinidadian culture frame his understanding of the personal frustrations and tragedies which confront ordinary people caught in the ebbs and flows of cultural change. Though *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (1979) remains his best-loved novel, *Salt* (1996) is his most ambitious novel yet, emotionally complex, seriously political, and, like all of Lovelace’s work, on the side of those marginalized. In the 1980s, Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua) and Caryl Phillips (St. Kitts) received a great deal of international attention. Jamaica Kincaid was already established in New York literary circles when her first volume of short fiction, *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), introduced her to a Caribbean audience. Fred D’Aguiar’s *The Longest Memory* (1994) belongs to an important group of West Indian novels that dramatize the long period of transatlantic slavery (Irele 735-58).

Literary works, written in English by Caribbeans, Asians, African and other people who originated from the ex-British empire but live in Britain are categorized as Black British writers and so in Britain there is a special category of literature
known as Black British Literature. The ‘black British literature’ came into usage in 1970’s. This term is racial rather than political. First in Black British Literature the Asian origin such as Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, both of Indian origin and Kazuo Ishiguro with roots in Japan, included in this category along with ‘black artist’ like Ben Okri, born in Nigeria, or Linton Kwesi Johnson, born in Jamaica. Now conventionally ‘Black British Literature’ refers to authors of African and Caribbean descent. Writers with Asian origin are now bannered as ‘British Asian or Asian British’. ‘Black British literature’ refers to a literary tradition which developed only after the Second World War, in the wake of the arrival of the Empire Windrush, the ship that in 1948 brought Jamaican immigrants to London and, therefore, assumed to be the starting point of the black presence in Britain (Birch 16-22).

Actually Black British Literature started in the 18th century, when Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789) or Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857) were published. Before the post – war, writers like Samuel Selvon or George Lamming, two writers from the Caribbean, started to publish after their arrival to London in 1950. These writers motivated the future generations of writers coming from the former Empire. In the 1930s literary figures like C.L.R. James from Trinidad or Una Marson from Jamaica, spent a part of their lives in England and actively participated in intellectual debates in English radical circles. Black British literature viewed the event, attached to post-war migration to England. The younger generation of writers born in England, some of whom are of mixed parentage, like Anglo-Jamaican Zadie Smith and Anglo-Nigerian Diana Evans are domestic than was the case for their predecessors. ‘Black British Literature’ is notable not only by displacement and migration but also more interested in their ancestral culture (Birch 16-22).
The best performance poets in Britain today are from the black community. Some of the notable poets are John Agard, Patience Agbabi, Lemn Sissay, Benjamin Zephaniah and Linton Kwesi Johnson. David Dabydeen's *Turner* (1994) is a long lyrical poem inspired by J.M.W. Turner's painting *The Slave Ship*, or Fred D'Aguiar's *Bill of Rights* (1998), a narrative poem about the 1978 Jonestown massacre in Guyana. In the field of drama too, ‘black British’ writing has had several outstanding ambassadors, like Michael Abbensetts, Mustapha Matura or Winsome Pinnock though their plays were performed in fringe theatres and have, therefore, not been very visible. Recently, the new generation of playwrights, has given their recognition. Famous young dramatists are Roy Williams, Courttia Newland and Kwame Kwei Armah. Kwame Kwei Armah’s best-known play *Elmina’s Kitchen* (2003) staged in the West End in 2004. Interestingly, ‘black British’ writing rarely associated with non-fiction, especially essay writing. However, many ‘black British’ writers, most of whom are university graduates, have used nonfictional forms to explore their ambiguous sense of belonging to Britain. Examples include George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), Caryl Phillips’ *The European Tribe* (1987), Mike Phillips's *London Crossings: A Biography of Black Britain* (2001), and more recently Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in England and Africa* (2005).

‘Black British’ writers have also produced challenging journalism, notably around issues of identity but also on more general political or cultural questions. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown is also the author of an autobiography called *No Place Like Home* (1995) (Birch 16-22).

The reputation of ‘Black British’ literature is still growing. Many Black British writers were awarded in the last ten years. V.S. Naipaul won the Nobel Prize in 2001; in 2004 Caryl Phillips’ *A Distant Shore* won the Commonwealth Writers'
Prize. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) won numerous awards. These two novels concentrate on how British society was altered by the immigration of Jamaicans and other citizens from the former empire. ‘Black British’ writing has earned significant recognition in academic circles, both in Britain and abroad. Some important publications are Lyn Innes's *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700-2000* (2002), Mark Stein's *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004), *A Black British Canon?* (2006) a collection of critical essays edited by Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies, and *Black British Aesthetics Today* (2007), another collection edited by R. Victoria Arana. The cultural theorist Stuart Hall has produced a major body of theoretical work at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and at the Open University, and he was widely influential in establishing the parameters of the debate. Paul Gilroy, who began his career as Hall's doctoral student at Birmingham, has also had an impact, and his works, including *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), *Small Acts* (1993), *The Black Atlantic* (1993), *Between Camps* (2000), and *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia* (2004). John La Rose, a poet and essayist from Trinidad who died in 2006, is celebrated for founding New Beacon Books in 1966, one of the first black publishing houses and bookshops in Britain, and for organizing the International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books, held in London from 1982 to 1995. La Rose prepared a new path to the circulation of black writing in Britain and abroad. Susheila Nasta, academic and editor, in 1984, founded *Wasafiri*, a journal internationally known for its balanced mix of high-quality creative writing and literary criticism. Journals like *Wasafiri* have made ‘black British’ writing accessible internationally. (Birch 16-22).
Black British writing is distinguished by its variety and originality. It has played an important role in the thematic and formal renewal of a variety of literary traditions. ‘Black British’ fiction, displays notable versatility. It includes crime fiction like Mike Phillips's *The Late Candidate*, (1990), Benjamin Zephaniah's children's fiction *Refugee Boy*, (2001), Ben Okri's fantasy fiction *The Famished Road*, (1991), and Courtia Newland’s horror fiction *Music for the Off-Key: Twelve Macabre Short Stories* (2006). However, ‘black British’ fictional writings’ keen interest is history, often combined with a special concern for ‘otherness’, not only racial, but also sexual and sometimes religious. Black British Literature has led to a tradition of writing that promotes complexity and heterogeneity while remaining alert to the politics of culture, race, and gender (Birch 16-22).

Several ‘Black British’ novels are dealing with transatlantic slavery published in the 1990s, by British writers of Caribbean descent. Fred D’Aguiar’s *The Longest Memory* (1994) and *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* (1999), and Caryl Phillips’ *Cambridge* (1991) and *Crossing the River* (1993), all revisit the history of slavery. These novels remind, of a painful history. They also establish a link between the exploitation of the past and continuing discrimination, racial or economic, in the present. The epigraph from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* which opens Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) shows that many other Black British fiction writers address the past in different ways. Leone Ross's *Orange Laughter* (1999) is a haunting story set in the United States and touches the mental problems caused by the suppression of traumatic memories. Other novels explore former times by establishing a link between Britain and the ancestral homeland, in many cases Africa. Helen Oyeyemi’s *The Opposite House* (2007), for example, revisits Yoruba mythology through Cuba, the place of origin of the parents of the
London based protagonist, while Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* (2007) focuses on a young Nigerian soldier who, like many other West Africans, fought on the British side in Burma during the Second World War. Many other ‘black British’ writers give voice to those who left out of history books and have for this reason remained unheard. Complex ideas of otherness explored in recent novels such as Diana Evans's *26a* (2005) and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005). Black British writers through their use of mixed-race twin characters, symbols of ambiguity and inbetweenness have expressed their ‘black British’ identity. This focus on the other as a means of identifying oneself also finds expression in intertextuality, as in David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991), which echoes Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), or Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2005), which can be read as a transposition of E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) (Birch 16-22).

The novelty of ‘black British’ fiction is not only distinguished by its thematic feature but also by its linguistic and structural inventiveness. In 1956, Samuel Selvon published *The Lonely Londoners*, an episodic novel that traces the lives of black immigrants in London and has now become a classic of the genre. ‘Black British’ fictions tend to display a fragmented narrative, developing the innovative models of modernism in order to express the discontinuity and the ambiguity at the heart of the ‘black British’ condition, but also reflecting the post-imperial nation. Significantly, some of these novels travel in time and space and are almost epic in scope, like Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), which sweeps over the history of India, or Caryl Phillips’ *The Nature of Blood* (1997), which brings the Holocaust and the predicament of black people in the West. This tendency of cross narrative and other boundaries sometimes accompany a fundamental questioning of the novel as a genre. Bernardine Evaristo's first novel, *Lara* (1997) and *The Emperor's Babe* (2001)
are both written in verse, a hybrid form which matches the identity of her protagonists, Lara, of mixed Nigerian and British descent, and Zuleika, a girl of Sudanese origin living in Roman London. This reconciliatory and creative pattern is also evident in other genres and is especially visible among writers of the new generation. It has a noteworthy precursor in Wilson Harris, a writer of Guyanese origin settled in England for almost 50 years, who, from his first novel *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), has relentlessly worked at an alternative world vision which he calls ‘cross-cultural’. In his twenty four visionary novels to date, and also in his essays, he has developed a highly metaphorical style to further a renewal of the imagination, which he regards as a saving virtue that can redeem the modern world.

Caryl Phillips, a notable Black British writer was born in St Kitts, West Indies on March 13th in 1958 and taken to England at the ‘portable age’ of twelve weeks from St Kitts, one of the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean. Caryl Phillips’ parents are Malcolm and Lilian. Phillips’ parents have roots in Africa but also in Madeira and India. His family relocated to a White, working class neighbourhood in Leeds, in northern England, and his childhood spent in mostly white, working-class areas, where he and his three younger brothers were the only black children. It is at the end of 1960s, at a Leeds Central high school; Caryl Phillips had a peculiar status among his schoolmates, he was the only black student on the rolls. Caryl Phillips nauseates his experience as a lone black boy in his class. “He spent most of his childhood fighting and running. These skirmishes aside, the impression he gives of his experience is that of an insider; different, certainly, but by no means peripheral. As he continues, it becomes clear that not all of his contemporaries were as fortunate” (Thomas). He was affected by the racism in England, and he has grown in that cultural difference mainly due to the difference in his skin colour from the native. He
expresses this comically. In a comic falsetto, Phillips imitates a well-meaning teacher at school telling him once that the difference between him and his classmates was that he had “just been left in the oven a bit longer, that’s all love” (Thomas).

In 1976, he won a place at the Queen’s college, Oxford University, where he studied English language and literature and to direct plays. In 1979, he completed his graduation in B.A (honors). His admission in Oxford University changed his path and not his life. He has also received numerous honorary degrees. He received an Honorary Doctor degree from the Leeds Metropolitan University in 1997 and from the University of York in 2003, and also honoured by honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Leeds in 2003, the University of the West Indies in 2010 and the University of Edinburgh in 2012.

Caryl Phillips is not only a prolific writer but also a professor of English and the winner of the Common Wealth Writer Prize for his novel A Distant Shore. He began his career in teaching from 1980, and till date he works as a professor of English. He has taught at several colleges and universities. He has worked as Writer-in-Residence in Arts Council of Great Britain, in Literary Criterion Centre, in University of Mysore, in India, in the University of Stockholm, Sweden, in National Institute of education in Singapore and also as a Writer-in-Residence and Co-Director of Creative Writing Center in Amherst College in Amherst. He has also worked as Visiting Writer at Amherst College at Amherst. He has worked as Professor of English at Amherst College, Amherst, MA and at Barnard College, Columbia University, New York and from 2005 to till date he works as professor of English at Yale University in New Haven. He has also been Director of Initiatives in the Humanities, Barnard College, and Columbia University, New York. He has worked as a visiting lecturer, visiting writer, visiting writing instructor and visiting professor at
the University of Ghana, University of Poznan, Poland, Humber College, Toronto, Canada, Arvon Foundation, England, New York University, New York, University of the West Indies, Barbados, Barnard College, Columbia University, New York, Dartmouth College, and in Oxford University, England. His areas of interest in teaching are Literature of the Middle Passage Advanced Composition, Post-colonial Literature, and Caribbean Literature since 1945, writing for the Stage and Screen, Fiction Writing, British Fiction: Colonialism, Class and Representation.

In addition to writing, Phillips has travelled the globe teaching and participating in seminars. Since graduating from college in 1979, Phillips has been a visiting professor, lecturer, and writer-in-residence at a dozen universities on almost every continent and has participated in more than hundred seminars in over twenty countries, serving as the keynote speaker at many events. He has been the Chairman in several seminars and conferences. In 1996, 1997 and 1998, he has been the Chairman in the Contemporary British Writing Seminar held in Brussels in Belgium and also in 1995, and 1996 in the first and the second Singapore Contemporary Seminar held in Singapore. He has also chaired the Walberberg British Writers Seminar Cologne, Germany held in 1994 and 1995. He has also been honoured with Guest of Honour at the Sierra Leone National Book Awards held in 2005 in Freetown, in Sierra Leone. He has been a keynote speaker in more than twenty five seminars and conferences. In addition to this, Caryl Phillips has toured all over the five continents for reading tour.

He has held many positions in his career like Board Member, Honorary Senior Member, Contributing Editor, Consultant Editor, Advisory Editor, Co-producer, Series-Editor, Senior Adviser, Director and Vice-President. At present, he holds the position as Honorary Senior Member at the University of Kent, Board Member in The
Caribbean Writer, Consultant Editor at Graywolf Press and BOMB Magazine, Advisory Editor of the Journal of Postcolonial Writing and WASIFIRI Magazine, Senior Adviser in Literature in The British Council, London and Advisory Board of Belgian Journal of English language and Literature and SMALL AXE, New York. Caryl Phillips has also visited India. In 1987, he worked as Writer-in Residence, in Literary Criterion Centre at the University of Mysore. He has also attended the Contemporary Writing Conference and Seminar held in Jaipur and Delhi in 1995.

Caryl Phillips after finishing his graduation spent a year in Edinburgh writing plays and scripts, so he is first a playwright. Phillips is now mainly known for his wide-ranging essays, and above all for his award-winning novels. His first published books were plays, Strange Fruit (1981), Where There Is Darkness (1982), and The Shelter (1984), which concentrate on issues of race, class, and gender, and, like all his dramatic writing, give pride of place to individual experiences and voices. He has written four plays. He published Rough Crossing in 2007. Caryl Phillips has written screenplay for two films namely: Playing Away (1987) and The Mystic Masseur (2001) based on the novel, by the same author V.S. Naipaul. The film debuted in 2001. In 2002, in the Mar Del Plata film festival, he won Argentina Silver Ombu for best screenplay for The Mystic Masseur. Caryl Phillips has also received many other awards namely: in 1994 Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Residency, in 1999 The University of the West Indies Humanities Scholar of the Year, in 2000 Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, in 2002 Mel and Lois Tukman Fellow of the New York Public Library's Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, in 2004 Caribbean American Heritage Award for Outstanding Contribution to Literature, in 2006 Honorary Fellow, The Queen's College, Oxford University and in 2011 Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.


Phillips’ fictions or non-fictions often echo with an autobiographical slant. Caryl Phillips through the historical prism of the Atlantic slave trade undertakes a personal quest to come to terms with the dislocation and discontinuities that a diaspora history engenders in the soul of an individual. “Caryl Phillips traces his own roots in trans-Atlantic voyages that formed a slave trade triangle” (Moorhouse). Caryl Phillips works highlight the Africa of his ancestry, the Caribbean of his birth, the Britain of his upbringing and the United States where he now resides. Phillips’ reputation as a novelist grounded in tradition and serious thought. Phillips revolves around the notions of home, identity and belonging, in an increasingly international society. In all his works, both fiction and non-fiction, Phillips probes the meaning of cultural dislocation, measuring the distinguishing features of identities geographic, racial, national, and religious against the amalgamating effects of globalization. Caryl Phillips detects the erosion of cultural boundaries and amasses startling and poignant insights on whether there can be an answer anymore to the question where you are from. The result is an illuminating and powerfully relevant account of identity from an exceedingly perceptive citizen of the world.
He won many awards for his novels. He won Malcolm X Prize for Literature for *The Final Passage*. *Crossing the River* was a finalist for Britain's prestigious Booker Prize for literature. In 1994, this novel won James Tait Black Memorial Prize. *A Distant Shore*, won the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for Best Book of 2004, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction, and nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and was a finalist for Britain's prestigious Booker Prize for literature in 2003 and Hurston/Wright Legacy award, in 2004.

A Black Atlantic writer is a writer who focuses on the Middle Passage, and the symbolic and literal meanings embedded in the Atlantic. Black Atlantic writers also focus on slavery, the slave trade, colonialism, postcolonialism, neo-colonialism, and how the slave trade developed the Americas while under developing Africa at the same time. Many of Phillips’ novels focus on the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade and its consequences for the African diaspora, for example, much of his writings also revolve around the Caribbean. Caryl Phillips is an exemplary Black Atlantic traveller and writer. He covers many subjects with Black Atlantic themes writing from the slave trade to post colonialism. His experience as a Black Atlantic traveller makes him a great Black Atlantic writer.

Caryl Phillips is a man of two worlds: born in the Caribbean and brought up in England. He left St. Kitts at barely three months old, when his parents migrated to England. Caryl Phillips’ confusion about his identity stems from his confusion about home and where he belongs. This motivated his travels as described in *The European Tribe*. Realizing his disconnection from his Caribbean heritage, Phillips embarks on a journey of discovery: “The direction in which my branches had grown still puzzled me, for the forces that had shaped their development were not to be found in the Caribbean” (ET 9). Throughout his narratives, he paints a picture of himself as
someone seeking answers, but his perception of the places he visits coloured by the lens of his British upbringing. Caryl Phillips in one sense seems to be running away from the values, morals, attitudes and symbols of British culture, which helped to create his identity. He is a black intellectual who engages in transnational travel by choice. Caryl Phillips is one of the most talented of the ‘post-colonial’ writers who have opened up new subjects for English fiction. Through his carefully crafted but passionate investigations of people painfully uprooted from their selves and their past, he has provided an original perspective on themes of home, exile and memory that have exercised the imaginations of many novelists. He has ranged widely, both geographically and historically, in creating narratives that stretch the boundaries of what readers once expected British fiction to be.

Slavery is another major historical episode that Phillips revisits almost obsessively in his works of fiction because he considers the peculiar institution as a founding event of modern societies both in Europe and the New World, explaining at once their heterogeneous population but also their inherent racism and their exclusion of the other, whether black, female, or Jewish.