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M.A SEMESTER FOUR

AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN POETRY

**DENNIS BRUTUS**

- Dennis Brutus (November 28, 1924 – December 26, 2009) is a major African poet, activist, educator and journalist.
- Born at Harare, Zimbabwe ( then Salisbury, Rhodesia)
- Classified as “coloured” under South Africa’s apartheid racial code .
- An activist against the white minority apartheid government of South Africa during the 1960s.
- Joined the anti-CAD (Anti- Coloured Affairs Department ) Organization – a group that organized against the Coloured Affairs Department which was an attempt by the government to institutionalize divisions between blacks and coloured.
- Was arrested in 1963 and jailed for 18 months on Robbin Islands in South Africa.
- Was forbidden to teach, write and publish in South Africa.
- In 1983 won the right to stay in United States as a political refugee.
- Was “unbanned” in 1990.
- Major works :
  - Sirens , Knuckles and Boots (1963)*
  - Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison (1968)*
  - Poems from Algiers ( 1970)*
  - A Simple Lust (1973)*
  - China Poems (1975)*
  - Stubborn Hopes (1978)*
  - Salutes and Censors (1982)*
  - Airs and Tributes (1989)*
  - A Book of Hope (1992)*
  - Still the Sirens (1993)*
  - Remembering Sweto (2004)*
- His works centre on his sufferings and those of his fellow blacks in South Africa.
- Centering on the theme of brutality of apartheid and racism , Brutus’s poetry combines anger with tenderness.

## **MERVYN MORRIS**

- Mervyn Eustace Morris ( born in 1937 at Kingston in Jamaica ) , a Rhodes scholar , is a major Caribbean poet.
- Has published several volumes of poems besides editing the works of other Caribbean writers.
- Well known poems – ‘Little Boy Crying’, ‘On Holy Week’, ‘Literary Evening, Jamaica’.
- Has been instrumental in shaping the Caribbean Writers’ Summer Institute which gave many younger Caribbean poets a chance to attend poetry workshops.
- Is known for his generosity and readiness to champion the case of young Caribbean poets and writers.
- ‘Literary Evening, Jamaica’ – In this poem Mervyn Morris expresses his sympathies for the budding Caribbean poets whose poetry, though often loud, brash and bold, is characterized by a sense of genuine anguish , pain and disillusionment. Mervyn Morris contrasts the writings of the young Caribbean poets with those of the English poets. His sympathies are undoubtedly with the young Caribbean poets who are struggling to find a place in the literary world. He advises the budding Caribbean poets to instill hope and faith in their writings because he feels that the Caribbean are too young for disillusionment.

## **EDWARD KAMAU BRAITHWAITE**

- Edward Kamau Braithwaite ( 11 May 1930—4 Feb 2020) is considered to be one of the major voices in Caribbean literary canon.
- Was born and brought up in Barbados.
- In 1963 , joined the University of West Indies , Mona Campus Kingston, Jamaica to teach in the History Department.
- Served as Professor of Comparative Literature at New York University during 1990s.
- Braithwaite is a seminal figure in Caribbean literature , historical and cultural studies.
- Tizzic – This poem is about a poor West Indian who has immense passion for music and is a “salve to drums , flutes, brave brass and rhythm”. He participates with great joy in a carnival marked with festivities, singing, dancing , drum beating and flute playing . During the two nights of this carnival he feels his spirits soaring high . The power of music lifts him to the gates of heaven – the very abode of God . He completely forgets his suffering and pain and could get all that he longed for. But this happiness is only temporary in nature. As the spell breaks with the end of the carnival and its accompanying festivities , singing and dancing , he finds himself a slave again condemned to poverty, confinement, torture and racial abuse.

## DEREK WALCOTT

- Derek Alton Walcott ( 23 Jan 1930—17 March 2017) is a well known Caribbean poet and playwright.
- Received the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature.
- Born of mixed European and African heritage ( Walcott is a light -brown skinned mulatto born and raised at Castries , St. Lucia in the West Indies).
- Has deep roots in his native culture and at the same time takes possession of his rightful place within the English speaking literary tradition.
- Uses literature to explore themes of ethnicity , cultural chauvinism and political inequality
- His poetry is expressive of his personal angst on account of a fragmented identity and reflects his strivings to resolve the paradox of his hybrid inheritance.
- Major poetic works :
  - 25 Poems (1948)*
  - Epitaph for the Young : XII Cantos (1949)*
  - In a Green Night : Poems 1948-60 ( 1962)*
  - The Castaway and Other Poems ( 1965)*
  - The Gulf and Other Poems ( 1969)*
  - Another Life ( 1973)*
  - Sea Grapes ( 1976)*
  - The Fortune Traveller ( 1981)*
  - Midsummer ( 1984)*
  - Omeros ( 1990)*
  - The Prodigal ( 2004)*
  - White Egrets (2010)*
- Though best known for his poetry , Derek Walcott is also a prolific writer for the stage and for musical theatre.
- Founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1959.
- Has published more than 20 plays.
- Major plays :
  - The Sea at Dauphin : A Play in One Act ( 1954)*
  - Ti-Jean and His Brothers (1958)*
  - Dream on Monkey Mountain ( 1967)*
  - Remembrance ( 1977)*
  - Pantomine ( 1978)*
  - The Haitian Earth ( 1984)*
  - Odyssey : A Stage Version ( 1993)*
  - Moon –Child (2011)*
  - O Starry, Starry Night ( 2014)*

- 'A Far Cry From Africa' – Written in the Spring of 1959 and inspired by the Mau-Mau revolt in Kenya during the 1950s, the poem deals with the theme of split identity and anxiety caused by Derek Walcott's divided heritage in the face of a struggle in which the poet could side with neither the British imperialistic forces nor the black natives of Kenya ( particularly those belonging to the Kikuyu tribe who were engaged in a guerilla warfare against the mighty British opponents ). The poem is expressive of Walcott's ambivalent feelings towards the Kenyan terrorists and the counter-terrorist white colonial government who were killing each other in the most brutal manner during the struggle . It exhibits the poet's dilemma , his inability to resolve the paradox of his hybrid inheritance as he feels " poisoned with the blood of both ... divided to the vein".