

The Ambiguous Status of Commonwealth Literature: A Critical Consideration

Denis Fonge Tembong, PhD
Department of English
Higher Teacher's Training College
Cameroon

Abstract: *Commonwealth Literature gained prominence and became an attraction to scholarship by 1960. A term habitually used interchangeably with 'Postcolonial Literature' is a hot commodity these days. However popular Commonwealth Literature is today, the concept is notoriously difficult to define. The passage of time rendered it vague, ambiguous and hard to delimit its scope, especially, with the cropping up of the new form of it known as 'Postcolonial Literature'. The overlapping features and concerns of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature, made it even more disturbing to situate it amongst world literatures. In analyzing it the tendency for scholars has often been to switch from Commonwealth to Postcolonial Literature and vice versa. This paper argues that although Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature are twin expressions by virtue of their closely related preoccupations, they are different and should not be considered as alternative terms. To sort out the common confusion in the use of the two terms, the paper proposes in a critical and elaborate manner, definitions, characteristics and differences between the expressions (Commonwealth/Postcolonial Literature).*

Key terms: *Commonwealth Literature, Postcolonial discourse, Ambiguous.*

Introduction

A spectre is haunting literary studies: the spectre of «post/colonialism.» No self-respecting scholarly journal can survive without a regular dose of it. No decent academic institution can do without a specialist, or at least an amateur, in the field. But what is the beast that goes by the name of «post/colonial literature»)? Is it merely ~Commonwealth Literature)) putting on another set of stripes, replacing those of former and now late popular disguises such as «New Literatures in English or «World Literature Written in English»)? Or is there more to it than that? And why does the term cause such heated debate? (Theo D'haen Leiden University. 11)

Commonwealth Literature poses a headache not as to whether or not it exists, for volumes of credible artistic works, scholarly articles, and tested critical theories have been published under the nomenclature - 'Commonwealth Literature'. The debate has evolved even beyond Salman Rushdie's opinion that, "there is no such thing as 'Commonwealth Literature'" to trying to

situate, define and delimit it amongst world literatures. When a phenomenon poses a problem of definition or identification, the temptation would be to conclude that it does not exist in the first place. This way of looking at things cannot be completely discarded or waved aside as unreasonable for there is some truth in it. Although this line of thought may not exactly be applicable to Commonwealth Literature, there is nevertheless the crisis of delimitation or identifying its borders. For instance, critics hardly find it easy to sort out the elements that constitute what they refer to as 'Commonwealth Literature' from those that make up Postcolonial Literature. It often poses a problem to define Commonwealth Literature because the body of works that are usually considered as belonging to this domain seems to overlap with what is professed to be Postcolonial Literature. Therefore, it is pretty difficult to clearly trace its boundaries and make a reliable distinction between the two terms. The temptation, therefore, is to use the two expressions as alternatives. These inseparable but distinct expressions are discussed in this discourse *pari parsu* for purposes of clarity, since they are like a pair of twins with the same umbilical cord, where an examination of one implies the other. In Henry Schwarz's opinion, it has become difficult, "to describe Postcolonial Studies than it was even five years ago" (1).

The adjective 'ambiguous' is formed from the term ambiguity, which I think merits an explanation in this context since it is central in our discussion and open to multiplicity of meanings. J. A. Cuddon in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* makes reference to William Empson's document, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. He observes that "this term has had some weight and importance in critical evaluation" (30). In brief, "Empson's theory was that things are often not what they seem, that words connote at least as much as they denote - and very often more" (30). Empson explained thus: ".We call it ambiguous . . . when we recognise that there could be a puzzle as to what the author meant, in that alternate views might be taken without sheer misreading. . . An ambiguity in ordinary speech, means something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful." Empson distinguishes seven main types, which may be summarised as follows:

1. When a detail is effective in several ways simultaneously.
2. When two or more alternative meanings are resolved into one.
3. When two apparently unconnected meanings are given simultaneously.
4. When alternative meanings combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author.
5. A kind of confusion when a writer discovers his idea while actually writing. In other words, he has not apparently preconceived the idea but come upon it during the act of creation.
6. Where something appears to contain a contradiction and the reader has to find interpretations.

7. A complete contradiction which shows that the author was unclear as to what he was saying

Apparently, all of the above shades of meanings apart from point five (5) appear to tie with the intended usage of 'ambiguous' in this discourse. Commonwealth Literature from its inception, like a cursed child infested with an unidentified ailment from its mother's womb, is bedevilled with unascertained birth and evolution. Its origin and evolutionary history appear to be paralysed by imprecision. John Rothfork does not hesitate to ascribe as one of the reasons for the weakness of works called 'Commonwealth Literature', the fact that, "taxonomically the designations never escape their flawed origins" (1). Beyond reasonable doubt, Commonwealth Literature exists and meets in the most part, classic definition criteria of what may be considered as literature. To stretch this point further, it would be necessary to briefly consider what literature is, in the first place. In *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J. A. Cuddon and C. E. Preston state that literature is "a vague term which usually denotes works which belong to the major genres: epic, drama, lyric, novel, short story ode" (472). They add that, "we describe something as 'literature', as opposed to anything else, if the term carries with it qualitative connotations which imply that the work in question has superior qualities; that it is well above the ordinary run of written works" (472). This could be expanded to consider the definition that argues that "Literature in present times generally taken to be imaginative compositions, mainly printed but earlier (and still, in some cultures) was oral, whether dramatic, metrical or prose in form. (Peter Childs and Roger Fowler 129). Commonwealth Literature fits squarely in the above citations, although "understanding exactly what literature is has always been a challenge; pinning down a definition has proven to be quite difficult" (Jim Meyer 1). However, it must be underlined also that, a literature that is born not out of a homogenous cultural group, community or people, but of unprecedented historical events, such as the Commonwealth of Nations and the associated motifs, has its peculiarities that seem to move away from classic consideration of the term. It is in this perspective that I think it would be rewarding to consider George McFadden's opinion:

...literature is a canon which consists of those works in language by which a community defines itself through the course of its history. It includes works primarily artistic and also those whose aesthetic qualities are only secondary. The self-defining activity of the community is conducted in the light of the works, as its members have come to read them (or concretize them). (56)

Principally, I think literature should first and foremost be viewed as a set of written works that address themselves to a given community or people, then the 'how', that is, the aesthetics and or artistic quality can follow. Going by this consideration, Commonwealth Literature becomes problematic as it addresses no precise cultural community. Rather, it stands as works from diverse communities written in English Language. The question that may be posed is whether Anglophone Cameroon Literature, for example, written by Anglophone Cameroonians, should be considered as Commonwealth Literature by virtue of its linguistic consideration.

Anglophone Cameroon Literature, characteristically, is nationalistic, protesting in the most part against marginalisation not from the west, but from their fellow Francophone Cameroonians, who are in power in the once Federated State of Cameroon, but now *La République du Cameroun*. Commonwealth Literature is certainly incomparable to other literatures such as the English, American, French, African, and the Caribbean, just to name these. The reason is simple – unlike Commonwealth Literature, they are works that address specific and well define communities and cultures.

Briefly tracing the origin of Commonwealth Literature sounds superfluous or appears to be recounting the historical facts that we are conversant with. However, it may help, if not to untie the nod associated with its definition and classification, it may illuminate some of the reasons given for the confusion connected with the expression. Historically, after the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, which granted full autonomy to the Dominions of the British Empire, the original British Commonwealth was set up whose members consisted only of British Dominions that were required to be united by a common allegiance to the Crown. Besides the United Kingdom, members of the British Commonwealth consisted of: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Union of South Africa, Irish Free State, Newfoundland (until 1933). They were later joined in 1947-1948 by: India, Pakistan, Ceylon. In 1949, the British Commonwealth was replaced by the Commonwealth of Nations with the adoption of the London Declaration, in which members were no longer required to have the British Monarch as sovereign, but could have their own head of state and were required to only recognise the British Monarch as Head of the Commonwealth. On 26th January 1950, India became the first country to qualify under these new criteria after becoming a republic. Pakistan became the second republican member in 1956. Malaya (now Malaysia) became the first member to have its own indigenous monarch, joining in 1957. Membership criteria were further redefined in 1991 with the Harare Declaration, which required members to abide by the principles of democracy and respect for human rights. These can be enforced upon current members, who may be suspended or expelled for failure to abide by them. After the accession of Mozambique to the Commonwealth in 1995 becoming its first non former British Empire member, being a former Portuguese colony, but interacting with Commonwealth members, membership criteria was even further redefined by the Edinburgh Declaration of 1997: (accept and comply with the Harare principles; be fully sovereign states; recognise the monarch of the Commonwealth Realms as the Head of the Commonwealth; accept the English language as the means of Commonwealth communication; respect the wishes of the general population *vis-à-vis* Commonwealth membership;).

The historical development of Commonwealth Literature is characterised by uncertain and ambiguous rules that make it difficult to trace its defining rules. Membership criteria kept changing and finally brought non-formal British colonies into the Association. Trying, therefore, to define Commonwealth Literature from the standpoint of its origin and development, that is, as

a literature of formal British colonies, meets with obstacles. The definition is inappropriate because Mozambique, a non British colony, like many others does not fit into it.

Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures Begging for Definition

The vagueness associated with the origin and evolution of Commonwealth Literature accounts in the most part for the headache in situating it. The expression “Commonwealth Literature” evolved and changed within a brief time span and caused the confusion that plague the domain. Edward O Ako discusses the ideological uses of the concept and argues that “the textual forms that emerged as ‘resistance’ to imperial domination were referred to by a multiplicity of terms: Commonwealth Literature, New English Literature, Literature in English, Third World Literature, World Fiction, Minority Literature, Multicultural Literature, or Postcolonial Literature” (3). This reveals just how uncertain and difficult it is to describe the literature. The term, generally, is an ambiguous expression, which defines English-language works written in the former British colonies or place which had the status of dominions. It is a body of fictional works grouped together because of the underlying cultural history and certain recurrent patterns. Elizabeth Ermath attempts to avoid the ambiguity by summarising it as “a point of transition where facts and fiction or history and literature merge” (38). Ermath’s opinion is a clear sign post but that quickly leads one to wider meandering crossroads. For Helen Tiffin, the notion of Commonwealth Literature is in itself “condescending, narrow and misleading” (1). The controversy is aggravated when one considers the opinions of critics, in *Learning from Each Other: Commonwealth Studies in the 21st Century*, where the authors think that the scope of Commonwealth Literature should be widen further to include literature in local or indigenous languages. If this were to happen, then the historical justification of the term and the prescriptions of the Edinburgh Declaration of 1997, that it should be literature produced in the English Language, will be defeated. A household critic in Commonwealth Literature, Salman Rushdie, posits that Commonwealth Literature is “a body of writing created, I think, in the English language by persons who are not themselves white Britons or Irish or citizens of the United States of America” (63). Rushdie believed that the concept or notion of Commonwealth Literature is intended to produce another genre or category of literature out of English Literature and that the “effect of creating such a ghetto was, is, to change the meaning of the far broader term ‘English literature’ which I’d always taken to mean simply the literature of the English language - into something far narrower, something topographical, nationalistic, possibly even racially segregationist” (63). What complicate things further are the overlapping characteristics of both Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature. Rothfork observes that, “Both these terms thus fall under the rubric of what is generalised in terms of the expression ‘post-colonial literatures’ ...they both involve a kind of homogenisation, that is contradictory to the very politics of highlighting these colonially repressed literary traditions”(1).

The inability to strike a consensus definition of Commonwealth Literature provokes varied hypothesis about the expression. Perhaps as a way out, Rushdie thinks that

'Commonwealth Literature Does not Exist'. The questions that may follow from this claim are: If Commonwealth Literature exists, what then is it? Can we homogenise the varied kinds of literary texts that are produced in these vastly different countries as something unitary in the form of a 'Commonwealth Literature'? An attempt to define postcolonial literature may play the trick and so help to say what Commonwealth Literature is not; if it is possible indeed, considering that postcolonial literature in itself is not a clear-cut concept. First, to define it in its most basic form as "that which happens after political independence" is to miss many possible applications of the concept; and second, "to define post-colonialism according to its political implications shifts attention away from the importance of the work as literature and lessens the intentions of the author"(John Yang 1). To make things worse, Antwan Jefferson contends that, "At best, defining post-colonialism can be considered a work in progress" (1). According to him, this definition in progress further problematises post-colonial literature because without a solid source, scholars can debate forever what constitutes a post-colonial work and if that work gives justice to post-colonial literature as a whole" (1). Kwaku Asante-Darko stretches the idea further by arguing that "Post-colonial literature is a synthesis of protest and imitation. It blends revolt and conciliation (2). He adds that "this duality permeates its stratagem, its style, and its themes in a manner that is not always readily perceptible to critics" (2). In *Postcolonialism: "the Empire Writes Back"*, the authors point out that "Postcolonialism consists of a set of theories in philosophy and various approaches to literary analysis that are concerned with literature written in English in countries that were or still are colonies of other countries" (199-200). He adds that "For the most part, postcolonial studies excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints and concentrates on writings from colonised or formerly colonised cultures" (199-200). The diversity of events that postcolonial studies grapple with makes the concept pretty slippery to pin down. For the past two decades, both the term and the field of postcolonialism have been subjected to thorough and extensive criticism from the perspectives of literary, political and religious studies. Theorists take different views about this field of study. From an optimistic point of view, Lazare S Rukundwa and Andries G van Aarde observe that "postcolonial theory is a means of defiance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and space, can be challenged" (1). They add that, by contrast, "the pessimistic view regards postcolonial theory as ambiguous, ironic and superstitious" (1). A postcolonial study is an extensive field opened to a multiplicity of descriptions, which may be summarised broadly into historical, political, social and economic sense. Historically, it describes, in Henry Schwarz's words, "the movements for national liberation that ended Europe's political domination of the globe" (1). Evidently, postcolonial studies expand beyond historical consideration, to include social concerns. Concretely, colonisers also tend to implant modern structures on their territories. For Schwarz, these include aspects such as "the exploitive economic system of capitalism and political structures borrowed from Europe such as territorial boundaries, parliaments, and censuses that de facto transform traditional practices into modern ones that can never be repudiated if a new nation is to participate in the international state system once it is liberated" (3). Thus, Schwarz contends that "it is not sufficient to limit postcolonial

studies to strictly historicist explanations. A number of sociological, economic, and philosophical questions have been raised within the field that cannot be contained within historical description” (5).

Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature: The Dividing Line.

The main features of Commonwealth and postcolonial literature are intertwined and usually pose a major problem to tear them apart. However, I think it is important to distinctively identify those elements that belong to one and not to the other of these related concepts. This would help to stake the boundary between the two notions and keep them apart as separate entities which they are supposed to be. In Sunday Agboola Olatunji’s opinion, “the complexity of postcolonialism in practice has led to a definitional problem”. Therefore, “this issue requires clarification” (125), at least for the purpose of this discourse. This would resolve the difficulty and avoid the melange most readers make of the two terms. In Ako’s words, some of these scholars “shy away from the term ‘commonwealth’ and prefer to use such terms as ‘postcolonial’” (5). It would be necessary to underline that Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature, no matter how closely related they appear to be must not be bunched-up as alternative terms without demarcation. We would not be doing justice to scholarship, if the twin expressions are not distinguished. In his definition, Ako states that, “the term ‘postcolonial’ is far more constrained than ‘commonwealth,’ although the former may in theory (but frequently does not in practice) encompass a wider field geographically” (5). On the one hand he argues that “Commonwealth studies potentially offer democratic and all-inclusive forms of social analysis, pointing to reconstructed societies and to communities beyond colonialism” (5). In the same vein, Olatunji posits that it is “a multifaceted and complex phenomenon which yields itself to various interpretations, uses and multiplicity of meanings (125). He adds that it is “a historical phenomenon which is linked to the observation, consideration and interrogation of the philosophical orientation, praxis and effects of colonialism on other societies” (3). “It questions, rather than confirms, the process of history” (Hutcheon 133).

The historical element features as a major distinction between Commonwealth Literature and Postcolonial Discourse. Although no literature, not even Commonwealth Literature can be said to be completely detached from its history. Postcolonial Literature unlike Commonwealth Literature, is particularly tied to and informed by its history. African written literature, to differentiate with African Oral Literature, is relatively new. It commenced with the advent of colonialism. This should not be implied that there was no African literature or culture before the advent of the westerners. After all, the rich, colourful and complex oral traditions existed. As literature that is informed by its history, “it opposes and interrogates the European ethnocentric philosophy which considers the western culture as the centre of human cultures or a ‘sommun bonum’ that all other cultures must aspire towards” (Boehner 12). He adds that “it emphasizes the beauty and potentialities of the ‘third world’ cultures tactically pushed to the margins” (12). According to Boehner, “It is the voice of the liminalised peoples against the philosophical

arrogance of the so-called established centres” (13). The importance of history cannot be overemphasised, for it orientates a people towards their roots. Olatunji asserts that history “enables human beings to learn from the past in order to modify the present so as to create a better future” (127). Woodson points out that “If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world and it stands the danger of being exterminated” (10-11). This infers that a people must be conscious of their history, “if they must continue to be responsible members of the human race” (Olatunji 127).

Language is another benchmark that demarcates postcolonial discourse from Commonwealth Literature. Rothfork holds that Commonwealth Literature is produced in English Language while postcolonial literature is translated into English. “Commonwealth literature (from the Commonwealth of Nations, hence written in English) and postcolonial literature (translated into English)” (1). Rothfork’s opinion, theoretically holds but practically is not feasible because it is not plausible to think that an author would first write in his native language and later translate into English, ‘the language of Commonwealth Literature’. Even if that were possible, what then constitutes the difference between the postcolonial text translated into English and the commonwealth text initially written in English? The language difference is rather visible, when it is considered as an instrument of struggle or protest in Postcolonial Literature, a phenomenon which is absent in Commonwealth Literature. Ashcroft et al, contend that “language is a fundamental site of struggle for postcolonial discourse because the colonial process begins in language” (283). Similarly, Amuta points out that “the most enduring symptom of the colonialist fixation of discourse on African literature is the problematization of the language question” (40). In the same vein, Olaniyan observes, “the imposition of colonial languages is the imposition of colonial culture” (39). Imperial imposition also brought about the suppression of the languages of the colonised. “The culture and history carried by these languages were thereby thrown on to the rubbish heap... to perish” (Ngugi 31). Considering the importance of language, African writers have engaged in a debate with two dominant positions emerging. Writers like Ngugi and Osundare suggest that linguistic indigenisation should be a condition for the existence of African literature. For instance, Ngugi asserted that “to neglect our languages and grab those of foreigners is tantamount to blasphemy” (254), while Osundare insisted that “the future of African literature and culture belongs to African languages” (66).

A major characteristic of postcolonial discourse, which separates it from Commonwealth Literature, is its radical opposition to colonial universalism. It is basically, protest literature as Kwaku Asante-Darko posits, “The African colonial experience has dominated the origin and nature of contemporary African protest literature and rendered it opposed to Western standards of aesthetics (2). Similarly, Shrikant B. Sawant argues that “The Post - colonial Literature and theory investigate what happens when two cultures clash and one of them with accompanying ideology empowers and deems itself superior to other” (120). Olatunji describing this phenomenon in other terms as universalism, observes that,

Universalism is precipitated by the hegemonic western epistemology developed to devalue the cultures of the other societies. It is rather unfortunate that many Africans accept the western concept of globalization without questions. The concept means economic and cultural developments of the West at the expense of the Africans. People should first develop locally, so that they can interact well with other peoples at global level. (128)

Unlike Commonwealth Literature, Postcolonial Literature, thematically, reacts to western concept of universalism by placing accent in their writing on “the beauty, dignity and excellence of black African life and culture” (Palmer 126), the privileging of the “distinctive characteristics, the difference of postcolonial societies” (Ashcroft et al. 55); and according to Hall, “the displacement of the ‘centred’ discourses of the West... questioning its transcendental claims to speak for everyone while being itself everywhere and nowhere” (226). To move away from western ‘superior’ cultural ideology, African authors focus on concepts such as ‘hybridism’ and syncretism, and “misreading”.

Establishing a difference between Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature can also be done from the angle of the concerns of both literatures, especially, in reclaiming spaces and places. Sarah Harrison argues that, “colonialism was, above all, a means of claiming and exploiting foreign lands, resources, and people. Enslavement, indentured labour, and migration forced many indigenous populations to move from the places that they considered ‘home’” (1). In her opinion, “Postcolonial literature attempts to counteract their resulting alienation from their surroundings by restoring a connection between indigenous people and places through description, narration, and dramatization” (1). Characteristically, Postcolonial unlike Commonwealth Literature is marked by resistant descriptions. Harrison points out that “Postcolonial writers use detailed descriptions of indigenous people, places, and practices to counteract or “resist” the stereotypes, inaccuracies, and generalizations which the colonizers circulated in educational, legal, political, and social texts and settings” (1).

Also, reworking colonial art-forms is a vivid artistic characteristic of postcolonial literature, which may not be very visible in Commonwealth Literature. Similarly, Harrison observes that Authors such as Arundhati Roy “rework European art-forms like the novel to reflect indigenous modes of invention and creation”. She stretches the point further when she says, “They reshape imported colonial art-forms to incorporate the style, structure, and themes of indigenous modes of creative expression, such as oral poetry and dramatic performances” (1). On the whole, the difference between the two concepts lies in the historical elements, language, and themes.

Conclusion

Commonwealth Literature is unique in the sense that the expression is commonly used but most difficult to ascribe a clear cut definition. Meanwhile, Postcolonial studies, in

Pennycook's opinion, "have been central to world history over the last two centuries. They have produced and reduced nations, massacred populations, dispossessed people of their land, culture, language and history, shifted vast number of people from one place to another" (19). Authors have resorted to using 'Commonwealth Literature' and 'Postcolonial Literature' as alternative expressions. Others think that Commonwealth Literature is the old form of Postcolonial Studies. Rowland Smith is one of those who believe that Commonwealth Literature has lost its place to Postcolonial literature and has become history. In his opinion, it does not exist any longer and so can be addressed in a new name called Postcolonial Literature. He argues:

Once upon a time there used to be a field called Commonwealth Literature. Then Salman Rushdie wrote an essay called "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist", and lo and behold, Commonwealth Literature ceased to exist. Or, rather, it got repackaged as Postcolonial Literature(s), Postcolonial Studies, and Postcolonial theory...at my university the Department calendar used Commonwealth/Postcolonial for a few years while the plastic surgery was in progress, dropping the Commonwealth altogether in 1993. (199)

Whether or not Commonwealth Literature died and reincarnated as Postcolonial Literature, the two terms are still essentially used today. Even if Commonwealth Literature were to be alluded only as history, it should be noted that the events that led to its birth and its preoccupations are different from the concerns of Postcolonial Literature. For instance, a future shift in events that motivated the production of postcolonial discourse and theory cannot suggest the death or extinction of Postcolonial Literature. For example, the advantages of globalisation and cultural integration may soon question the relevance of Postcolonial Literature, which is centred on protest against imposing western presence, especially, in a world that is fast moving towards perfection and in a single cultural village. After all, "Yesterday's brash counter-discourse is today's comfortable discourse of power" (Ken Goodwin 142). One of the reasons for the incorporation of Commonwealth Literatures into the 'English' curriculum according to Godwin is that it is a body of writing in English from outside the United Kingdom and the United States of America that is worthy of study. Godwin remarks that "the introduction of 'literary' qualities into discourse is, of course, almost always characterised by multi-faceted, ambiguous, and often contradictory principles" (143). He argues that its inclusion is "to displace the literature of Britain from its central place in the tertiary (that is, post secondary-school) literary curriculum" (144). This argument insinuates that it would be a mistake not to think that Commonwealth Literature exists in its own right or keep thinking that Commonwealth Literature is an alternative term to Postcolonial Literature. In the same light, Godwin points out that "'Commonwealth Literature' and its other surrogates seem to refer basically to a field of study, specifically a body of texts ...seem to be cognate with 'British literature', 'Victorian literature', or 'American literature', that is, they seem to denote primarily a body of potential texts for study" (144). He contends that, 'Postcolonial literature(s)' also has this denotation, "but it also represents in a way quite different from the alternative terms, a process or a set of reading practices. One can

produce a 'postcolonial reading' of a text, but hardly a 'Commonwealth Literature' interpretation" (144). Godwin concludes that "'postcolonial' is cognate not with 'Commonwealth Literature' but with 'New Criticism'" (144-45). In the same vein, "the concept of 'Commonwealth Literature' as a separate disciplinary area within English studies began in the early 1960s in both the United States and England" (Bill Ashcroft et al. 45).

It is worth noting Iva Polak's observation that "The term 'postcolonial' has definitely avoided some of the problems of its terminological predecessors (Commonwealth literatures and New Literatures in English), but has created problems of its own" (135). Polak implies that Commonwealth Literature and new literatures in English are different from Postcolonial Literature, which is a new emergence with its new problems or preoccupations. It is important to remember that the insistency involved in the birth and development of Commonwealth Literature causes its writers and critics to slight into another closely related writing, but motivated by events that are fundamentally and historically different. These differences therefore must not escape our memory and should help us to keep the two expressions distinctively apart. Admittedly, the related concerns of both Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literature make it difficult to situate them but this should not cause the reader to lose sight of the inherent differences between the two. Whichever approach that may be taken towards Commonwealth Studies, one thing is certain that it exists in its own right, although fusing into every direction like rainclouds and changing features like a chameleon.

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