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## WALCOTT'S OWN WORKS: "REAFFIRMATION OF CARIBBEAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY"

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### ABSTRACT

This Research paper is about the literary works of Derek Walcott which give us a foretaste of the making of Caribbean culture and identifies. According to the writer, Caribbean culture is not a copy of anything. "It is an amalgam of People from different origins and their experiences" – African, Indians, Chinese, English, Dutch and French – who creates a unique environment that develops its own culture and identity. This amalgam of people also brings in the mind the movement of people which is not possible without displacing them from one place to another.

The displacement gives birth to the concept of loss – loss of identity, culture, history, memory, and language. The writer tries to balm up the "psychological wounds" of native people through his poetry. The concept of dislocation and uprootedness follows the process of displacement of people. Delving into noble prize laureate, Derek Walcott's own work is a dive in the depth of the Caribbean past, present and future. Through his writings, Derek Walcott voices the existence of Caribbean culture and identity in the complex situation during the time of establishment of European powers.

This paper exposes the intricate relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. It is an effort to introduce the Caribbean culture and identity which is described as "a place with no stable cultural origin". It also tells us the ways in which the Caribbean is gashed between different places and loyalties. These two are the central themes of Walcott's writing.

**Keyword:** Psychological wounds, displacement, mongrel, dilemma, multicultural amalgam, poised

### INTRODUCTION

Walcott's poems reflect the existence of Caribbean culture, the process of identity making, idioms, folkways, and cadence of his beloved west indies, yet he remains immensely respectful of the structural tradition of English poetry and works within the classic framework of the genre. The depiction of the 'bush' in Derek Walcott's early poetry deals with the issue of place and space in mind. In the poems of Walcott, the term 'bush'

denotes both a literary/ideological and geographical topos. For the many Caribbean, the bush symbolizes indigenous resistance. His work is marked by the experiences of the Caribbean and reflects their identity and heritage. The poetry and drama of the Walcott are the voice of Caribbean.

In "What the twilight says" - an autobiographical essay published in 1970, Walcott writes of the two worlds that informed his childhood and refers to the Caribbean self as a mongrel of

Africanness and Britishness. In a simple schizophrenic boyhood, one could lead two lives – the interior life of poetry and the outward life of action and dialect.

His poetry demonstrates a significant relation to the tradition and it also manifests an elegant blending of sources – European and American, Caribbean and Latino, Classical and Contemporary. Later works including *'In a Green Night'* 1948 – 1960 reveals a poet who has learned his craft from European tradition and who remains mindful of West-Indian landscapes and experiences. The task of Walcott as a young poet, one he undertook with the enthusiasm for both *imitation and experimentation* was to develop an idiom adequate to his subject matter.

Though his poetry displays a passion to record Caribbean culture, this tendency is more apparent in Walcott's drama which draws consistently not only on his native patois but also regional folk traditions. Walcott wrote a series of verse plays, including **"Henry Christophe"** which recounts an episode in Caribbean history using the diction and plotting of Jacobean tragedy. *'Dream on Monkey Mountain'* is considered Walcott's greatest work. It is one in which he makes a great effort to interpret the nature of Caribbean culture and identity. Reality and dreams are interwoven in the drama in which the main character, Makak (French patois for Ape) faces imprisonment and dreams that he is crowned king in the romantic Africa of his roots.

#### DISCUSSION

Derek Walcott is the major voice of Caribbean naissance. His strength lies in the creative tension between the particularity of his Caribbean setting and universalities of his theme and style. His stylistic influences and allusions resemble those of Donne, Marvel, Yeats, Hopkins, Proud, Lovell, and Graves. Passages of his poetry resemble Elliot's "Prufrock" in parody, Thomas in tone, and Auden in satire. The constellation of thematic polarities is responsible for much of creative power in the poems of Walcott. Isolation is the most prominent of Walcott's themes. In the poem 'The Schooner Fight' (1979), Sabine, a Walcott persona, gives an

often quoted definition of the identity of a person from a small country in the Caribbean:

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea, I had  
a sound colonial education,  
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,  
And either I'm nobody or I'm nation, (40-43)

An important part of Walcott's poetry and drama has a partially sub-conscious program, the "Caribbeanization" of the earlier, European motives. Walcott is artistically adept at exploring the many layers of the themes "The divided Self" he examines it from an angle of vision which reflects that which is comic/tragic, cosmic and personal. Walcott's writings incorporate themes of identity, exile, isolation, birth, death, creation, and the growth of national consciousness, and the portrayed of an artist. The journey motif is the hub of these themes and links them in a central way to the poet's persona! Development as a craftsman emanating from Walcott's work is also a blend of sadness, nostalgia, psyche, and landscapes. The pre-mentioned themes are found in much of Walcott's poetry in text such as "In Green Night", "Another Life", "Star Apple Kingdom", "The Fortunate Traveler".

Walcott's sense of dual citizenship exemplified both of his poems "The Gulf" and "A Cry from Africa". In the poem "The Gulf" the poet is leaving the United States which becomes a metaphor for the gap between the poet and the people and the places he is in love with. The poet expresses his agony with the statement: "as the plane begins its flights, "friends diminish". So "The Gulf" upholds a discouraging picture of separation which transforms the United States from the symbol of the new world optimism into a sign of individual alienation. "A Far Cry from Africa" is also the best example of the sort of duality, the dilemma about his double heritage and his split self- becomes evident. He questions, "How to choose/between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" For Walcott, the Caribbean writer breathes two different traditions, namely the African and the European traditions: I am a kind of split writer; I have one tradition inside me going in one way, and another going another way. The mimetic, the

narrative, and the dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other. Such a Split reality has various consequences for the way in which the colonized self can think of itself, particularly for Walcott, whose mixed racial heritage highlights the historical dilemma between races. In the best poem, -- "A Far Cry from Africa" he grapples with the issue of conflicting loyalties and asks,

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?

I who have cursed

The drunken officer of British rule, how  
choose Between this Africa and the English  
tongue I love? Betray them both, or give  
back what they give?

How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live? (p. 26-33)

In Walcott's work, the poetic creativity and imagination can serve to explore and at times unite and re-connect historical gaps, cultural tensions, and racial divisions, as the example of -- "A Latin Primer" shows that Walcott's poetry that probes, engages and at times transcends differences and divisions through poetic imagination. Several critics have pointed out that the Caribbean landscape is central to the imagination and creativity in Walcott's works. It is through this Caribbean mixture of African and European models and the use of the local landscapes that Walcott finds the potential for the forgoing of a language that went beyond mimicry as in "What the Twilight" says a language that would be uniquely Caribbean.

"The Light of the World" continues Walcott's exploration of the ambiguous identifications of the Caribbean self in a multi-racial context stemming from the colonial era, but he also addresses the related issue of international migration where Caribbean people migrate outside of the West Indies. At the same time, this poem is also a strong protest against the British colonization on the Caribbean people. In the Later work, "North and South" (1981), this poem's persona gives another effort to express an identity and alludes to the literary void of the Caribbean region, where the British curriculum focused on literature of the

classical traditions, rather than one Caribbean culture and referring to himself as:

A colonial upstart at the end of an empire,

A single, homeless, circling satellite (56-57)

Caribbean nature constitutes a powerful source of inspiration for the literary production of the emerging poet/ narrator, in a context where Caribbean identity is in the process of defining and establishing itself. Caribbean nature constitutes also a fundamental element of liberation and self-definition, as the narrator is trying to find voice away from the silence that clogged ears.

In one of his other poem "A Map of the Antilles", the Odysseus archetype finds a "destructive ocean" (p.55) between the islands which seems for the failure to unite.

This is a brief?

Ignored by our first parliaments to charts,  
The dangerous currents of dividing grief

That makes our union a mockery of the  
heart. (I.A.G.N. P.55)

#### CONCLUSION

Walcott has the natural ability to develop characters that simultaneously have the humility of Shabine and grandiose qualities of Odysseus. Walcott's Caribbean characters do not seek to "live up" their heroic counterparts. Walcott is the consummate poet/sociopolitical critic whom Plato would have repudiated from his republic, a writer who makes various critical commentaries on the Caribbean's contemporary sociocultural situation and Everett argues that Walcott's use of both classical and Homeric themes actually satisfies his "Fever for heroic examples". Like other critics of Walcott's work, Everett views this intersection between the classical and Caribbean as merely a companion. However, it is the clearly more than a simple juxtaposition a greatness or heroic strengthen.

Poet and Playwright Derek Walcott received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. The prize was awarded to him "for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment". He reached this apex of literary achievement by transmitting the Caribbean culture with strength, sensitivity, beauty, and ingenuity. When the Swedish

Academy awarded poet and playwright Derek Walcott the Nobel Prize it recognized a brilliant artist's response to what the Academy called the "complexity of his own situation".

Walcott's life and work teeming intersection of cultural forces, a space that his friend and fellow poet James Dickey described with a remarkable litany: "*Here he is, a twentieth-century man, living in the West Indies and in Boston, poised between twentieth-century man, living in the West Indies and in Boston, poised between the blue sea and its real fish and the rockets and warheads between a lapsed colonial culture and the industrial north between Africa and the west between slavery and intellectualism, between the native Caribbean tongue and the English, learned from books, between the sound of home ocean and the lure of European culture*". These relationships have remained a major subject of his work because his imagination has never lost contact with his never lost contact with his native West Indies, which animates his writing with its intense physical beauty. His writings explore the troubled relationship between this gift and a colonial heritage and the problems of a fragmented post-colonial identity. While Walcott has been praised for his lasting contributions to Caribbean Theatre, receiving credit for establishing a truly native dramatic form, The Nobel committee singled out a work of poetry when it selected him as laureate in 1992. "Omeros" (Modern Greek for Homer) is a book-length poem that places his beloved West Indies in the role of the ancient bard's Cyclades.

It should be born in mind that Walcott's is quintessentially a Caribbean poet. The identity can never overshadow his coveted status as a poet of "International Status". The 1992 Nobel-Prize in the literature places him on the altar of the poet of the universe. But the general Caribbean experience makes the ground of his poetry from which his private joys, pains, creative thoughts and realization take off. In "Midsummer" he says:

"The midsummer sea, the hot pitch road,  
and this grass, these shacks that made me, Jungle  
and razor grass shimmering by the roadside, the  
edge of art;

Wood lies are humming in sacred wood,

Nothing can burn them out, they are in  
blood; (1-4)

The concluding line "How can I turn from Africa and live?"(36line no.) reflects Walcott's agony. As a dedicated Caribbean poet he cannot think of his existence turning from Africa but his divided loyalties engender a sense of guilt as he wants to adopt the "civilized" culture of the British.

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