

RESPONSES TO HISTORY: THE RE-ARTICULATION OF

POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY IN THE PLAYS OF

WOLE SOYINKA AND DEREK WALCOTT

1950 - 1976

Neloufer de Mel

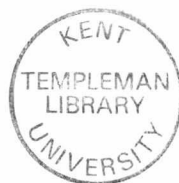
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ABSTRACT

The thesis will discuss the plays of the Nigerian Wole Soyinka and St. Lucian Derek Walcott as sites in which the playwrights are engaged in a dialogue with their colonial history, and in response to its impositions, re-articulate post-colonial identities. Soyinka and Walcott have been chosen as case studies of the post-colonial re-articulation of identity because they offer two important broad options available to the post-colonial today. Soyinka has recourse to a viable indigenous Yoruba culture which he posits as an alter/native tradition to the coloniser's. Walcott on the other hand, the victim of a far more deracinated saga, feels he has no such "native" tradition to recoup, and re-writes the history of the Caribbean through European metaphors.

The thesis will show however that although the playwrights re-articulate their identities in radically different ways, their strategies for doing so are less divergent than they appear at first. Both Soyinka and Walcott negotiate their post-coloniality from **within** the coloniser's own discourse, with the references and paradigms of the European "Centre". In marking this, the thesis points to the fact that their work reflects the contradictions that constitute post-coloniality itself, for by challenging the coloniser's impositions of colonial identity through the coloniser's discourse they affirm that which they deny and deny that which they affirm, rehearsing the contradictions and complicities their post-colonial identities are predicated on.

The thesis is in two parts. Part 1 begins with a general introduction to both playwrights in which their autobiographies **Aké** and **Another Life** are looked at to situate them in the context of their personal and larger histories. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 deal specifically with Soyinka. **Myth, Literature and the African World** is discussed as a site in which Soyinka is engaged in a de-colonizing project, constructing paradigms from the Ogun myth for the benefit of both a wider English speaking/reading audience and "alienated" African, after which **A Dance of the Forests**, **The Strong Breed**, **Death and the King's Horseman** and **The Bacchae** are read as texts which illustrate the paradigms constructed in **Myth**.

Part II deals with Walcott. Chapter 5 discusses Walcott's essays on history against other articulations of identity such as Black Power, and his use of the Crusoe story as a paradigm for the West Indian experience is analyzed. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 discuss **Henri Christophe**, **Sea at Dauphin**, **Ti-Jean and His Brothers** and **Dream on Monkey Mountain** as plays informed by Walcott's central concerns on the nexus of history and identity in the West Indies.

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INTRODUCTION

The re-articulation of post-colonial identities in response to the impositions of colonial history by playwrights Wole Soyinka of Nigeria and Derek Walcott of St.Lucia, is of particular interest to me as a Sri Lankan post-colonial. The agendas both explicit and implicit in their work, the contradictions they inhabit as post-colonials and which often constitute the dynamism of their work, speak poignantly of the problematic of post-coloniality itself. For it is a space fraught with marginality and privilege, alienation and the possibilities of integration, and for the post-colonial, socio-political responsibilities as citizens of countries struggling to gain equilibrium in a system where the dice is loaded against them, and indeed where present neo-colonial machinations cannot be wished away.

My use of the term "post-colonial" is derived from two perspectives which, taken together, identify the space of post-coloniality as it will be looked at in the thesis, and permit me to deal with the plays of Derek Walcott which were written before St.Lucia gained Independence in 1979.

I use the term "post-colonial" to signify the lingering legacy of the imperial/colonial relation in all its positive and negative aspects...The cultures of countries that are officially independent yet suffer the continuing presence of economic and psychological dependency. They continue to be marginalized in English Studies. They share a tension between imposed and inherited language and culture, and an experienced place.

Diana Brydon¹

¹ Diana Brydon, "The Myths that Write Us: Decolonising the Mind," Commonwealth 10, no.1, Autumn 1987. p.4.

(The term post-colonial) proves most useful not when it is used synonymously with a post-independence historical period in once-colonized nations but rather when it locates a specifically anti- or **post**-colonial **discursive** purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international relations.

Stephen Slemon²

The "black" post-colonial writer-intellectual as a subject focus of this thesis is deliberate, given the particularly fraught history of those who have been oppressed for centuries through institutionalized racism which produced justifications on the basis of genetics, race, and cultural superiority. The word "black" is used in the thesis in terms of its current usage in England to designate all people of "colour" in the colonial context, and have had therefore, a particularly vicious history of racism to contend with.

I have chosen Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott as case studies of black post-colonials engaged in a dialogue with their histories and coloniality for many reasons. They are influential writers who have won many public accolades, culminating perhaps in the Nobel Prize for Literature for Soyinka in 1986 and the Queen's Gold Medal for poetry for Walcott in 1989. They are self-consciously engaged, as their whole oeuvres testify, in addressing issues of moral responsibility that fall on them as

² Stephen Slemon, "Modernism's Last Post," Ariel 20, no.4, October 1989. p.6.

contemporary writer-intellectuals. As such, they are influential figures within their own societies, examples for other writers to follow, borrow from or militate against.

Most importantly perhaps, they are two writers who approach their histories and construct identities in different ways, because their strategies for re-articulation are rooted in the respective colonial histories of Nigeria and St. Lucia as well as their personal histories and milieus. Taking them together then, I hope to show that Soyinka and Walcott provide two important case studies of the post-colonial re-articulation of identity because their strategies represent two broad options available to the post-colonial writer negotiating his/her identity and writing in English today. For Soyinka has recourse to a viable indigenous Yoruba culture out of which he constructs mythic and artistic paradigms to posit as elements of a sophisticated alter/native tradition to the coloniser's. Walcott on the other hand, the victim of a far more deracinated and violent history feels he has no such native tradition to recoup and re-names his Caribbean landscape with European metaphors.

It will be my burden to show however that although the playwrights re-articulate their identities in radically different ways, their strategies for doing so are less divergent than they appear at first. It will be shown that both Soyinka and Walcott negotiate their post-coloniality from within the coloniser's own discourse and with the references and paradigms of the European

centre. In marking this, I will be pointing to the fact that their work reflects the contradictions that constitute post-coloniality itself, for by challenging and seeking to subvert the coloniser's impositions of identity through the coloniser's own discourse, they inevitably affirm what they deny and deny what they affirm, rehearsing the contradictions and complicities their post-colonial identities are predicated on.

The thesis will be structured in two parts. Part 1 on Wole Soyinka and Part 11 on Derek Walcott. Chapter 1 entitled "Colonial History and the Post-Colonial" will serve as a general introduction to both playwrights in which their autobiographies **Aké** and **Another Life** will be looked at as texts which hold insights into the forces that have constituted the playwrights' sense of self. Chapter 2 entitled "Myth as Metaphor: Soyinka's Alter/native Tradition" will discuss **Myth, Literature and the African World** as a site in which Soyinka engages in a de-colonizing project, constructing paradigms from the Ogun myth for the benefit of both a wider English speaking/reading audience and "alienated" African, thus returning to the people what was taken away from them with the denigration of their indigenous cultures by the coloniser in the first place. Chapters 3 and 4 will discuss the plays **A Dance of the Forests**, **The Strong Breed**, **Death and the King's Horseman** and **The Bacchae** as texts which illustrate the paradigms constructed in **Myth** and discuss the relevance of Soyinka's mythic metaphors for contemporary experience.

Part 11. Chapter 5 entitled "Muse of Gorgon? Walcott and History" will discuss Walcott's essays on history, in particular "The Muse of History", "What the Twilight Says: An Overture" and the lecture "The Figure of Crusoe". Walcott's reactions to other articulations of identity such as Black Power and the agenda of a writer like Edward Kamau Brathwaite to rehabilitate the African legacies in the Caribbean will be discussed. Also analyzed will be Walcott's use of the Crusoe story as a paradigm for the West Indian experience which, it will be shown, enables his "Adamic" endeavour of re-naming the Caribbean. In Chapter 6, I will discuss Walcott's first major play **Henri Christophe** as a text in which, dramatizing the tragedies of the leaders of the Haitian revolution, Walcott voices a central concern that is reiterated by him throughout his work - the danger and futility of seeing in the sordid and violent history of the Caribbean, pretexts for revenge which, given the region's colonial history, would be inevitably articulated on racial lines. In Chapter 7, entitled "Towards a Syncretic Language: **Sea at Dauphin and Ti-Jean and His Brothers**", the plays will be read as Walcott's best Adamic efforts in which the playwright turns to the linguistic environment of St. Lucia and celebrates the history of the slave/peasants' survival in the Caribbean. Finally, Chapter 8 entitled "Dream as Metaphor: **Dream on Monkey Mountain**" will discuss the play as one in which Walcott argues for the need of the West Indian to allay the ghosts of the past, both European and African, and getting **beyond** history, root himself in the

Caribbean itself, for the first time possessing the land he was forced onto.

Both Soyinka and Walcott will be shown then to be playwrights who are constantly engaged with issues concerning the nexus of history and identity in their respective societies in their work, and in the following chapter I will attempt to situate them in the context of their personal and larger colonial histories in order to better understand their agendas and strategies with which they re-articulate identity.

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PART ONE

***All these are affirmations of identity,
however forced***

Derek Walcott

What the Twilight Says: An Overture

CHAPTER 1COLONIAL HISTORY AND THE POST-COLONIAL:WOLE SOYINKA AND DEREK WALCOTT IN CONTEXT

For the colonial, the study of his (sic) history
 is a journey into self rather than time past
 Gordon Rohlehr¹

Rohlehr's contention is that the study of history can never be for the colonial an uncomplicated preoccupation with a chronological narrative of past events, but rather, one that is implicated in his/her sense of identity.² For this history narrates how colonialism irrevocably changed indigenous societies and constructed particular identities for its "victims" which shaped their cultural awareness and sense of place in the world. In uncovering this history, the post-colonial confronts the forces which have written his/her society, culture and sense of self.

It has to be argued, however, that such a response to history is by no means restricted to the post-colonial. For in

¹ Gordon Rohlehr, "History as Absurdity," Is Massa Day Dead ed. Orde Coombs (New York: Anchor Press & Doubleday Inc., 1974), p. 75.

² I define "identity" deliberately in its ordinary usage and as it exists in the works of Soyinka and Walcott. Identity is a self-conscious construct of a cohesive self. It will be my burden to show that it requires a forcing together of disparate elements and an effacement of contradiction in order to obtain this cohesion.

all societies there is a preoccupation with this nexus of identity and history, an interest which manifests itself in myriad ways. Yet Rohlehr's insight that there **is** a distinct relationship in the post-colonial context between identity and history remains fundamental to our understanding of the specific contexts of post-coloniality. The distinction is that, whereas in other cases individual identities **can** be constructed without directly engaging with a collective history, the post-colonial must always be identified in terms of the fraught history that has produced him/her.

This is because the black writer/intellectual in the post-colonial context inhabits powerful contradictions. S/he is both marginalized by a colonial enterprise that has placed him/her forever at the periphery, and privileged within his/her own "native" society, by virtue of his/her education and social status which also comes from being a "native informant" vis-a-vis the metropolitan centres. S/he re-articulates identity by rehabilitating his/her indigenous culture in his/her work, but often does so within the terms and references of the colonizer's. The very language s/he uses to unmask the colonizer is, being the colonizer's own tongue, implicated in, and expressive of the very culture s/he chooses to question. In working within a written medium, the novelist in particular moves away from the indigenous oral traditions s/he often sets out to celebrate.

The history of the colonized subject's economic and cultural

marginalization begins with the rise, in the 15th Century, of European nation states such as Britain, France, Spain and Portugal to maritime powers, their sphere of trade and influence widening to encompass most of what the third world is today.³ Consolidating their trading links and routes with strategic forts and towns obtained through alliances with kingdoms and principalities, and eventually the acquisition (often with force) of colonial territories, these nations plied a wide trading network encompassing Africa, India, the Far-East and the Americas, with Europe at the centre. Gold was looked for in West Africa and South America to fulfil the increased demand for coins with the growth of capitalist money economies in Europe, ivory was got from East Africa, and spices and cloth obtained from the East. An economic system in which these Other/peripheral territories became totally dependent on European markets and metropolitan centres soon came into being, for there were no African or Chinese traders sailing to Europe in equal trade, and whatever surplus produced in the colonies was syphoned by the colonizing European to support the technological, welfare and

³ I use the terms "first/third world" and "margin/centre" in this thesis because, although they hierarchize and homogenize diverse economies, societies, territories and histories in dangerous ways, alternatives like "developed/ under-developed" are patronizing and unilinear, and therefore, untenable. A language which explains the colonial experience without effacing the diversity, national boundaries and power relations involved, needs to be constructed. The project is underway in the field of development economics where "North/ South" for instance has gained currency, but it has yet to construct suitable terms to encompass the historical and cultural experiences of the post-colonial world.

cultural development of Europe.⁴

With the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, the slave trade began. Indigenous Ameri-Indian populations were decimated before long as they could not withstand European diseases and hard labour conditions in the mines, and in some cases they suffered genocide at the hands of the Europeans. The Europeans' need for labour to work in the mines and subsequent plantations could not be met from within Europe itself as the continent had a relatively small population, and so Africa was looked to as the nearest continent to both the Americas and Europe as a fount for labour.

The slave trade and the machinations of economic imperialism played fundamental roles in the construction of racism in European thought and ideology, which served to justify the abhorrent trade and systematic exploitation of the colonized. The subjugation of diverse peoples for centuries could not have taken place without notions of superiority on the part of the colonizer, constructed through generalizations and assumptions about the culture and "nature" of the colonized. On encountering indigenous cultures that were unknown and therefore strange and Other, and people whose physical difference visibly marked them as "strange/rs", the European colonizer categorized them as

⁴ See Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1983).

Also Leonard Woolf, Empire and Commerce in Africa (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1968).

primitive, and wove round the colonized subject diverse images of primitivism, cannibalism and intellectual deficiency in anthropological and medical ("scientific") texts, travel writing, literary works, educational material, the media etc. They were articulations which fixed the colonized as inferior, and questioned his/her humanity in a very determined way, all the while reinforcing the "superiority" of the colonizer's own civilization and, explicitly, the achievements of the white European.

The construction of these images was so effective, and uncontested by and large by the colonized whose lack of economic and political power gave him/her no effective voice, that they were subscribed to by many. Hegel for instance had this to say about African societies:

What we actually understand by "Africa" is that which is without history and resolution, which is still fully caught up in the natural spirit, and which must be mentioned as being on the threshold of world history.⁵

That was in the early 19th Century. A century later, in 1962, Professor of History at Oxford University, Hugh Trevor Roper, was subscribing to the same view. Roper declared, "Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness...and darkness is not the subject

⁵ Quoted in James Snead, "Repetition as a figure of black culture," Black Literature and Literary Theory ed. Henry Louis Gates jnr. (London:Methuen,1984),pp.62-3.

of history."⁶

The political advantages of these images were manifold. On the one hand they justified the colonial enterprise as a "civilizing" mission, the white man's burden of introducing Christianity and "culture" to "primitives", thereby finessing its commercial exploitation. Thomas Babington Macaulay, member of the Supreme Council of India from 1834-8 who declared that "a single shelf of a good European history is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia"⁷, officially instigated in a speech to the House of Commons on 2nd February 1835, and in July that year in his famous minute, such a mission, to be effected through the education of elites in India. Macaulay stated to the House of Commons:

What is power worth if it is founded on vice, on ignorance, and on misery; if we can hold it only by violating the most sacred duties which as governors we owe to the governed and which, as people blessed with far more than ordinary measure of political liberty and of intellectual light, we owe to a race debased by three thousand years of despotism and priestcraft. We are free, we are civilized to little purpose, if we grudge to any portion of the human race an equal measure of freedom and civilization.⁸

⁶ Quoted in Michael Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule (London:Hutchinson & Co.Ltd.,1968),p.10.

⁷ Quoted in Susantha Goonatilake, Crippled Minds: An Exploration into Colonial Culture (Colombo & New Delhi:Lake House Bookshop & Vikas Publishing pvt.Ltd.,1982),p.91.

⁸ Quoted in Gauri Viswanathan, Masks of Conquest:Literary Study and British Rule in India (London:Faber & Faber,1990), pp.16-7.

On the other hand, these notions of superiority salved European consciences when genocide of indigenous peoples, wanton destruction of livelihoods and artifacts took place, since what was already devalued was of little worth anyway. The colonized subject's historical and cultural identity was categorized and fixed through such images which, mediated by the colonizer's language (and here language is used as a metonym for culture), proved insidious. For given the power and impact of colonial authority, the politics of literary production, and colonial education which suppressed and/or purchased the voice of the assimilated colonial, as Edward Said noted in Orientalism, "Out of such a coercive framework ...a modern "coloured" man is chained irrevocably to the general truths formulated about his prototypical linguistic, anthropological, and doctrinal forebears by a white European scholar"⁹, and we may add, administrator.

The overt and confrontational form of colonialism gave way, in time, to a more "benevolent" one which has proved no less insidious. For there was a gradual shift, although it must be borne in mind that each form often contested each other, from the colonial discourse which asserted the superiority of all things European over the African, Asian and Caribbean, to a discourse approximating cultural relativism, but one where the reference points were always grounded in the colonizer's own ethos. By the late 18th Century, European scholars - archaeologists,

⁹ Edward Said, Orientalism (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.237.

sociologists, anthropologists, philologists etc. - engaged for instance, in what Edward Said termed in relation to projects in the "Middle-East", the Orientalist enterprise. These scholars took an active interest in the cultures of the colonized Other. From Barthelemy d'Herbelot's Bibliothèque Orientale (1697) which served as a standard reference on the "Orient" for the West until the early 19th Century, to Richard Burton's travel writings in the East and translation of Arabian Nights (1886), to the accounts of the Hashemites by T.E.Lawrence as imperial agent during and after the 1st world war, to works like Modern Trends in Islam (1947) by Sir Hamilton Gibb, we see the urge to "understand" the Orient and explain it to the West. Even in these studies however, it is the **West** that remains at the centre. Orientalism served both as useful intelligence to a Europe which was ruling the Orient, and, as Said states, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."¹⁰

The colonial enterprise, whether marked by projects of denigration or selective patronage as outlined above, generated

¹⁰ Edward Said, Orientalism, p.3. Lyn Innes draws attention to a similar discourse of relativism vis-a-vis Anglo-Celtic studies. Matthew Arnold advocated the establishment of a Chair of Celtic Studies at Oxford, and in his lectures, stressed a child-like and feminine Gaelic character which was in contrast to the mature and masculine image of the Anglo-Saxon. Innes states, "Ostensibly sympathetic to the Irish character, Arnold's lectures emphasize that its relationship to the fundamentally solid English structure is to be a subsidiary one. The Celt's function is supplementary, never primary or even complementary". The Devil's Own Mirror (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp.12-3.

in turn, de-colonizing responses by intellectuals within the colonies. The denigration of indigenous cultures led to a resurgence of interest in them by the colonized as acts of defiance. Straitjacketed into a particular role designed by the European colonizer, it became imperative for the colonized to subvert such impositions in a manner which made them untenable, invalid. It must be borne in mind however that this tendency was nowhere near universal. The irony was that Macaulay's minute¹¹ did prove prophetic in that English education produced an elite that thought, felt and behaved like English men (and women?). But in the reaction against institutional racism which justified colonial exploitation on the basis of genetics and cultural superiority, there were the angry rebuttals of the Négritude writers such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor, as well as those like Octavio Manoni and Frantz Fanon who tried to understand what colonialism had done to the psyche of the colonized peoples. The writing, both "creative" and "analytical", of these colonials and post-colonials took on a different emphasis from that of the colonizer's. Instead of an exclusive Eurocentric perspective which "objectified" the colonies, there was, in these works, the perspective of the colonized, taking

¹¹ Macaulay stated, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population." Quoted in Susantha Goonatilake, Crippled Minds, p.92.

issue, albeit in radically different ways, with eurocentric, racist and imperialist notions.

Thus Négritude writers like Césaire, Senghor and Leon Damas embarked on rehabilitating in their work, the histories, cultures and world-views of black people; C.L.R. James analyzed and affirmed the Haitian revolution of 1791-1803 as the only successful slave rebellion and first war of independence waged by a colony in Black Jacobins (1938); writers like Octavio Manoni, Aimé Césaire, George Lamming, Roberto Fernando Ratemar appropriated Shakespeare's The Tempest - a text from the dominant culture - and, using its colonial tensions, created with different emphases and employing various forms, fresh and vital re-definitions of themselves and their relationship to colonial history; Frantz Fanon wrote psycho-sexual studies of the colonized black male and female in Black Skin White Masks (1967), and discussed the politico-economic structures of the colonial machinery particularly as it affected the Algerian Revolution of 1954-62 in A Dying Colonialism (1959), The Wretched of the Earth (1961) and Towards the African Revolution (1964); and politician/freedom fighters like Amilcar Cabral, Gandhi, Nkrumah, Ho Chi Min struggled, each in their own way, to escape the colonial oppressions imposed on their people.

We can say with hindsight that many of these efforts were flawed. A writer like Senghor for instance unconsciously conformed to the very racial stereotypes he attempted to

challenge. Homogenizing black people and infusing them with an animist, "negro essence", Senghor polarized in his work black and white as manichean forces, and affirmed the worth of "black" culture, but only in so far as it contributed to enhancing an European/universal civilization. Octavio Manoni, in reading Caliban's rage as indicative of his disappointment at the departure of Prospero (whose own active agency in the colonial enterprise Manoni never questions), furthered the notion of colonial dependency in Eurocentric terms. Perhaps such flaws arise, inevitably, as a result of attempting to challenge the system from within its own discourse. What is significant however, is that this phase of de-colonization and the burgeoning interest of European scholars, writers, musicians and artists in the histories and art forms of these Other native cultures, made the Macaulayan blanket denigration of the entirety of non-European cultures untenable.

And yet, even with the passing of this Macaulayan moment, the nature of the first world's interest in the indigenous cultures of its former colonial territories continues to keep the contemporary colonized subject marginalized vis-a-vis the global context. For by and large, the study of these cultures takes place only in so far as they can be appropriated to enhance and validate the texts and contexts of the dominant groups in the first world, or their representatives elsewhere.

Responding to this continuing marginalization then, the prime impulse of the contemporary black post-colonial writer becomes

the rehabilitation through his/her work, of what s/he perceives as indigenous culture, and the re-articulation of identity on his/her **own** terms.

Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott are two post-colonial playwrights who construct such self-conscious identities in their work¹², retrieving or claiming as the case may be, alternative traditions to those of their colonizer's. Their strategies are rooted in the correlatives as well as radical differences to be found in their colonial histories, family environments and individual responses to their respective milieus. It would be useful therefore to turn first to their autobiographies Aké¹³ and Another Life¹⁴, for they are texts in which the playwrights describe events and people who have been influential in their lives, and contain therefore the histories

¹² This study is confined to the major published essays, plays and autobiographies of Soyinka and Walcott spanning a period of twenty six years (1950-76), in which can be seen an overt and self-conscious engagement with colonial history and a re-articulation of collective and individual identity. Lack of space has prevented me from referring in depth to Soyinka's political satire in particular, or all of Walcott's plays, although there is in these works too a constant dialogue with history, predicated as such for being, as I argued earlier, the work of post-colonials.

¹³ Wole Soyinka, Aké: The Years of Childhood (London:Rex Collings,1981). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition. In the description of Soyinka's background, I will also be drawing from his latest novel, Isara (London: Methuen,1990) which, subtitled "A Voyage Around Essay" is, as Soyinka states in its preface, an attempted reconstruction of the times, thoughts and feelings of his father, friends and life in Isara, and as such, a work which expands on Aké.

¹⁴ Derek Walcott, Another Life in Collected Poems 1948-1984 (New York:Farrar, Straus and Giroux,1986).Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

which have determined their world-view.

The initial use of these personal histories in this thesis requires explanation, particularly as it has been argued that the construction of identity involves structures of power such as class, race, gender and region which require consideration **outside** personal histories, although the personal provides the immediate context in which Soyinka and Walcott write. But just as the construction of identity is a larger-than-personal phenomenon, responses to personal histories locate the agendas of the playwrights considered here. In a nutshell, it can be said that Soyinka's oeuvre can be read symptomatically as an articulation of the personal as political. That is, he can be seen to be using his personal and cultural history to explain the broadest general contexts. His Yoruba culture becomes for instance, the paradigm of "African" culture which again is universalized as singularly appropriate for contemporary reality. On the other hand, for Walcott, his world-view derives from a reduction of the political to the realm of the personal. As will be shown, he argues in his plays for a rejection of a positivist sense of history which, in the Caribbean context, leads, according to him, to revenge and despair, violence and recrimination. But it is a stance driven by his personal experience as a middle-class, educated elite who is, moreover, a mulatto. Aké and Another Life will be looked at then as texts which hold insights about the wider social and political contexts in which the playwrights' work can be situated.

In many ways the backgrounds of Soyinka and Walcott are remarkably similar. The playwrights were born in British colonies, Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka born on 13th July 1934 at Abeokuta in Nigeria, and Derek Alton Walcott born four years earlier on 23rd January 1930 at Castries in St. Lucia, the second largest windward island of the Caribbean archipelago. Both had parents who were, as principals of their respective Christian primary schools, educationists. Soyinka's father Samuel Ayodele was the Head Master of St. Peter's Primary School at Aké, while Walcott's mother Alix was Head Mistress of the Methodist Infant school at Castries and on occasion, Acting Head of the Methodist Primary school. Walcott's father Warwick was, as Clerk to the First District Court, a civil servant. Although later appointed acting Deputy Registrar, it was a post he did not occupy as he died on the day he was to assume duties, from complications following surgery for a mastoid condition when Walcott and his twin brother Roderick were just a year old.¹⁵ Soyinka's mother Grace Eniola was a proprietress of a shop and an influential founder member of the Egba Women's Union.

The make-up of colonial society under the British was such that by virtue of their education and professions, the playwrights' parents belonged to an indigenous middle-class which was influential and privileged. Colonial education was

¹⁵ See Edward Baugh, Memory as Vision: Another Life (London: Longman, 1978), pp. 4 & 9.

structured, particularly in the more developed urban centres, to encourage the formation of an indigenous class fluent in English and in tune with the colonizer's values, to function as interpreters between the colonial authorities and the non-English speaking indigenous population, and as assistants in administration. On completing their education members of this class joined the local civil service as Walcott's father did, or became educationists, lawyers and doctors, establishing themselves as an elite indigenous bourgeoisie. Although racial/political discrimination on the part of colonial authority prevented them from being appointed to legislative bodies and key posts in the administration during the first two to three decades of the 20th Century¹⁶, the privileges of belonging to such a class were nonetheless manifold. For, once a part of the administration even at a clerical level, the western educated colonial wielded considerable power and enjoyed social prestige as an intermediary between the native community and the European colonizer, and eventually, with the growth of cultural and political nationalism, as a negotiator for independence on behalf of the colonized people.

Soyinka belonged to a particularly renowned family in this respect. His mother was a member of the Egba Ransome-Kuti family which was influential in Nigerian politics and in the vanguard of proselytizing Christianity in Western Nigeria. She was the

¹⁶ See Michael Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule, p.382 & pp.425-6.

grand-niece of Rev. J. J. Ransome-Kuti (not his grand - daughter as James Gibbs ~~misstates~~¹⁷), a well-known Yoruba politician and public figure, and the niece of Rev. I. O. Ransome-Kuti (known as Daodu in Aké) who, as principal of the Abeokuta Grammar School and first Chairman of the National Union of Teachers of Nigeria, was a highly respected educationist, and consequently, advisor to the British government on university education in West Africa. Soyinka's father was held in high esteem as well, for being a teacher, he was looked up to in the community, accorded the title "Head Master", and his home at Aké recognized as "the intellectual watering-hole of Aké and its environs." (Aké, p.19) The importance of his achievements was even more tangibly appreciated in his home town of Isara, where the people, being mostly poor farmer-peasants, did not have adequate opportunities of education, and valued highly one of their own who did.

The families of the playwrights enjoyed social prestige. Soyinka's father was the son of a chieftain and related to, and on visiting terms, with the royal Odemo who was the titled head of Isara as well as the Alake at Abeokuta. He was a landowner, owning a farm near Osiele which was cultivated for him by a hired farmer. (Aké, p.136) And although Walcott's father died prematurely in his thirties, causing the family economic hardship and forcing the playwright's mother to undertake sewing orders to supplement

¹⁷ James Gibbs, Wole Soyinka (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.2. On page 5 of Aké Soyinka refers to his mother as the grand niece of Rev. J. J. Ransome-Kuti.

her income¹⁸, the Walcotts too belonged to a privileged St. Lucian milieu. For Walcott's grandfathers were European, his paternal grandfather an Englishman who settled in Barbados and his maternal grandfather a Dutchman who lived on the leeward island of St. Maarten, and given the racial/class make-up of colonial Caribbean society, members of a privileged elite.¹⁹ The family had, moreover, friends like Grace Augustin, who owned the estates "D'Aubaignan" and "Patience" on the eastern coast of the island, where Walcott spent his school vacations.²⁰

For both Soyinka and Walcott class privilege meant alienation from the mainstreams of their communities which were poor and uneducated. They were sensitive to this from a young age and experienced guilt at their privileges in the places that confirmed them the most. For Soyinka it would be at Isara, where he and his siblings, as the urban, westernized children of "Head Master" were the focus of much attention, that he would look at the Ijebu market women's homes and observe "their shabbiness (which) could not be disguised" and sense "the strain of sheer survival" beneath the joy with which they welcomed the visitors

¹⁸ In Another Life (p.153), the description of Walcott's mother at the Singer sewing machine echoes Aimé Césaire's description of his "mother whose feet, daily and nightly, pedal, pedal for our never-tiring hunger". Return to my Native Land trns. John Berger and Anna Bostock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.46.

¹⁹ Walcott's maternal grandfather was Governor of St. Maarten, and although Alix Walcott was brought up and lived with her mother elsewhere, she was extremely proud of her European ancestry. My interview with Mrs. Margaret Walcott, July 1989.

²⁰ Edward Baugh, Memory as Vision, p.5.

from Aké. (Aké, p.130) Similarly for Walcott, it would be while walking through Grace Augustin's private estate that he would observe the smoke from the labourers' cottages on the property, and be seized with pity at the deprivation in the lives of the St.Lucian poor. He would later describe this as a seminal experience in Another Life, and stressing the burden of labour, write,

I was seized by a pity more profound
 than my young body could bear, I climbed
 with the labouring smoke,
 I drowned in labouring breakers of bright cloud,
 then uncontrollably I began to weep,
 inwardly, without tears, with a serene extinction
 of all sense...

(AL, p.185)

Walcott's emotions here echo those of Wordsworth's as the latter looks on the Cumbrian poor in The Prelude. Walcott however does not distance poverty through a haze of mystical beauty as Wordsworth does. For him, poverty is immediate - the condition of St.Lucia itself as a "cruelly ignored colony".²¹ Nor does Nature hold for him remedial possibilities for such a condition as Wordsworth believes.²² He would instead turn to creative writing in order to re-write the history of the St.Lucian peasant in an endeavour to give him/her dignity.

The gulf which existed between the playwrights and the underprivileged in their societies was further compounded by

²¹ Derek Walcott, "Meanings," Savacou 2, September 1970, p.45.

²² For a detailed comparison of Another Life and The Prelude, see Travis M.Lane, "A Different Growth of a Poet's Mind" Derek Walcott's Another Life," Ariel 9, no.4, October 1978.pp.65-78.

the cultural milieus Soyinka and Walcott inhabited. Growing up in colonies where differences in cultural pursuits and values had correlatives in class stratifications, the playwrights were aware from a young age of two different worlds - an indigenous one belonging to a deprived peasant majority, and a westernized middle-class one of their own - which did not coincide and were at times in direct conflict with each other. Soyinka for instance grew up at the centre of Christian activity at Aké, for his father, being the principal of the Anglican Primary school, had quarters within the missionary compound which also included the church, parsonage and school. This compound, with its enclosed walls would constitute in the young Soyinka's mind his Akéan world of Sunday school, prayers, and mother whom he nicknamed "Wild Christian" for her exuberant personality as well as convert's ardour, while beyond its fortifications would be a "pagan" and mysterious indigenous world waiting to be explored. As a child, Soyinka caught glimpses of this Other world from a strategically placed ladder which provided the community within the missionary compound a vantage point from which to observe indigenous rituals such as egungun rites etc. taking place outside. Representatives of this world came into Soyinka's orbit at Aké moreover in the guise of the Ijebu market women of Isara, who slept the night within the compound having journeyed on foot with their wares prior to market day. They were however, never invited inside his home except for two paternal aunts who, as the young Soyinka observed, never came beyond the front room and in any case were never called "Auntie". (Aké, p.128-9)

For as Soyinka wryly comments, "Wild Christian had a way of "leaving out" the unbeliever". (Aké, p.139) Brought up in a family which was at the hub of Christian activity at Abeokuta, believing implicitly in the dictates of her religion and the values on which it was based, Soyinka's mother was suspicious of the superstition and "sorcery" of the indigenous world and sought to protect her children from it. She cautioned them against accepting food from any home other than their grandfather's when at Isara, for fear that they would be poisoned (Aké, p.130), (advice inevitably contradicted by the grandfather who told Soyinka it was common courtesy to do so as long as his instincts permitted), and advised them to be on their guard at all times when encountering this world. As Soyinka describes, "Our Ijebu relations, it seemed, had a reputation for poisoning, or for a hundred and one forms of injuring an enemy through magical means. We were drilled in ways and means of avoiding a handshake, for various forms of injury could be operated through the hands. One would return home and simply wither away." (Aké, p.130)

The power of this "sinister" world would live moreover in the young Soyinka's mind in the stories which told of the confrontations between this indigenous world and his own. The youngster would recall tales in which egungun masks would battle with a Christian bishop and take revenge at the latter's impertinence in carrying on with a church service while the

ancient rite was in progress, by willing the church wall to collapse, and in which spirits and ghommids of the forest endangered the life of his uncle Sanya who was, significantly, cured only within the missionary compound. Soyinka could not be but aware then from an early age of an indigenous world which was in conflict with his own Christian, westernized ethos. And although his father would be very much at home in Isara, his greatest influence on Soyinka was at Aké, where he encouraged his son to read widely in European literature, which, while crucial to Soyinka's western education and development, alienated him still further from the world at Isara where life and survival depended on a traditional core of collective knowledge on social forms, nature, farming, the jungle and its animals etc.

Walcott too belonged to a family which placed great emphasis on the importance of western education and culture. Actively participating in western cultural pursuits, his parents provided their son with both a home environment in which he avidly imbibed these cultural values, as well as a sense of legacy he would continue to develop as an artist. For Walcott describes his father as being an excellent draughtsman, . one who painted, in western forms, portraits and landscapes in oils and water colours and made fine copies of verses he would find in the household cupboards.²³ The son saw in these works of his late

²³ Derek Walcott, "Leaving School," The London Magazine 5, no.6, September 1965. p.9.

father a cultural legacy he felt was his direct inheritance and as such, one he had to continue from where his father had left off.²⁴ But although Walcott singled out his father as a particularly inspirational force, one whose craftsmanship he would always admire and strive to emulate, there was a sense of the theatrical which infuses even his poetry - there is for instance a tremendous sense of drama in Chapter 4 of Another Life in which, with echoes of Under Milk Wood, the people of Castries are portrayed - which the playwright inherited from his mother. For Alix Walcott was interested in theatre and well known in the community in her own right for the plays and variety entertainments she produced at the Methodist school.²⁵ Walcott would find then in his family circle, which, apart from his own talented parents included a violinist, "an inveterate reciter" named Emmanuel Auguste and Harry Simmons who had been encouraged to paint by Warwick Walcott and would himself become the playwright's mentor and father-figure²⁶, a "spiritual" strength and cultural conviction that would give him direction in his vocation in life.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid. See also Derek Walcott's "Meanings," p.45.

²⁵ Patricia Ismond, "Derek Walcott: Development of a Rooted Vision," Ph.D thesis, University of Kent, 1971. p.193. After the death of her husband who had been a driving force in an amateur dramatic group which had produced Shakespearean plays and musical concerts in Castries, these theatrical activities were taken over by Alix Walcott.

²⁶ Edward Baugh, Memory as Vision, p.13.

²⁷ Derek Walcott, "Meanings," p.45.

Belonging to such a cultural milieu - an elite one, given its colonial/western ethos - Walcott was inevitably estranged from the St.Lucian working class which spoke creole and was moreover, Catholic. For religion would be another alienating factor for the playwright who was a Methodist in a country where over 90% of the population are Catholic. St.Lucia in fact occupies a unique position in this respect as a former British colony which is predominantly Catholic. But the island, as a result of its strategic geographical location and large harbour (in Another Life, Walcott satirizes a history lesson during which St.Lucian schoolboys are taught to declare that Castries's claims to fame are that it is a coaling station, the 27th "best harb in der worl'" and that "In eet the entire Breetesh Navy can be heeden!" (AL,p.172)), had been fought for between 1635 and 1815 by Britain and France in the course of their imperial battles, and changed hands no less than thirteen times.²⁸

It is a history enacted in fact in an annual festival in St.Lucia, in which there is a contest (now restricted to singing and dancing) between the "Roses" and the "Marguerites" - names which have obvious reference to England and France, possibly

²⁸ The strategic value of the island became clear as St.Lucia provided a vantage point from which the British could, for instance, spy on naval movements in the French island of Martinique. In February 1782 when a French fleet left Martinique for a rendezvous with the Spanish, prior to a joint attack on British Jamaica, the commander of the British squadron Admiral Rodney was in a position, having seen the fleet leave Martinique, to pre-empt the attack by defeating the French fleet near Dominica. See F.R.Augier, D.G.Hall, M.Reckord The Making of the West Indies (Port of Spain & Kingston:Longman Caribbean, 1984), p.109.

denoting the Republican cause against the Bonapartists.²⁹ And although from 1815 onwards St.Lucia remained a British colony until independence in 1979, the influence of Catholicism which increased considerably with the arrival of the Fathers of Mary Immaculate from La Vendee in France who ran Catholic parishes on the island in the late 19th century³⁰, together with French words, inflections and idioms inhabiting St.Lucian creole have remained important legacies of the French occupation of St.Lucia to the present date.

Although as Edward Baugh points out, within Walcott's own social class religion was not a barrier, (his best friend Dunstan St.Omer who figures as Gregorias in Another Life is a Catholic)³¹, the playwright's own relationship with religion and what he recognized and came to despise as the narrow minded Catholicism of St.Lucia, contributed to his growing sense of marginalization in society. Walcott's attitude to the Catholic church itself was/is ambivalent. Appreciating the theatrical, he relished the rituals of the Catholic mass and festival celebrations, and consequently resented his pragmatic Methodism which prevented him from participating in this theatre of the church, which was, as its congregation comprised 90% of the population, the theatre

²⁹ Kole Omotoso, The Theatrical into Theatre (London: New Beacon Books, 1982), p.34.

³⁰ Edward Baugh, Memory as Vision, p.7. See also Patricia Ismond, "The St.Lucian Background in Garth St.Omer and Derek Walcott," Caribbean Quarterly 28, nos.1 & 2, March-June 1982. p.33.

³¹ Edward Baugh, Memory as Vision, p.7.

of the St.Lucian majority itself. He would write wistfully in "Leaving School" of a St.Lucian life underscored by "the rhythm of the Church's calendar year, its bannered, chanting processions, Les Enfants De Marie, Retreats and Friendly Society parades" during which, as part of a religious and cultural minority which did/could not participate and was left behind, he "would feel the town was empty and belonged to (him)."³²

And yet Walcott despised the institution of the Catholic church in St.Lucia for its complicity in the colonial enterprise, and its dissemination of a doctrine which he saw as inculcating in the poor a fatalistic attitude to their poverty. He would therefore use his work from an early age to denounce the church for its insidious role in the colonial process and indoctrination of the peasant with its religious dogma. For this he was virulently attacked and ostracized by the church in turn. Edward Baugh describes how in response to a poem entitled "1944" Walcott had written when he was just fourteen years old which spoke of "finding God for oneself through communion with nature", Rev.C.M.Jesse had replied also in verse, attacking the poet for pantheism and heresy, which in Walcott's words, had come as "a painful shock" to him.³³ Samuel O. Asein in his article "Drama, the Church and the Nation in the Caribbean" describes another incident in which the Catholic church took exception to a scene in Walcott's play Henri Christophe (1950) and sought to undermine

³² Derek Walcott, "Leaving School," p.8.

³³ Edward Baugh, Memory as Vision, p.8.

its performance. Resenting what it saw as the irreverent blasphemy of the First Mercenary who, as he awaits his quarry Dessalines in scene 4 of the play, questions the morality and purpose of a whimsical God, the church refused the Arts Guild of St. Lucia which was producing the play, permission to use a room in the Catholic school for its performance unless the offending scene was omitted from the production. Having no alternative facilities for staging the play, the Arts Guild was forced to submit, but not before including a terse note in the programme informing the audience that the scene had been deleted "to conform with the wishes of the Sister of the convent."³⁴ The stage was set then for a conflict between the playwright and the church which was to be long lasting (in an interview with Selden Rodman as late as 1974 Walcott accused the church of being "mafialike"³⁵) which inevitably gave the playwright a sense of being **victimized** as well as marginalized by a majority whom he felt were under the clutch of the St. Lucian Catholic church. As he stated in "Leaving School", "I was thus, in boyhood, estranged not only from another God, but from the common life of the island."³⁶

Factors of class, cultural interests, education and

³⁴ Samuel O. Asein, "Drama, the Church and the Nation in the Caribbean," The Literary Half-Yearly 26, no.1, January 1985. p.151.

³⁵ Quoted in Selden Rodman, Tongues of Fallen Angels (New York: New Directions, 1974), p.255.

³⁶ Derek Walcott, "Leaving School," p.7.

religion combined then to make both Soyinka and Walcott feel alienated from the mainstreams of their societies. It would be out of such an experience that they would, in plays such as The Strong Breed and Sea at Dauphin empathize strongly with alienated characters like Eman and Afa, while Walcott would in particular also identify closely with victimized figures like Van Gogh and Harry Simmons.³⁷

The works of Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott are sites in which they negotiate their marginality with self-conscious attempts to root themselves more firmly in their "native" environments. In doing so, they re-articulate identity vis-a-vis the wider English speaking world as well, for recognition of the values of their own cultures and landscapes means challenging the images of identity imposed on them as black colonials by the colonial masters.

It is in their strategies for integration and re-

³⁷ Harry Simmons who worked as a Customs Officer, had talents and interests which ranged from botany, history, lepidoptery to collecting stamps. It is however as an artist and master that he is celebrated in Another Life - one who lived closely with peasants and "returned their tribal names/ to the adze, mattock, midden, and cooking pot." (AL, p276) Walcott was particularly sensitive to the fact that, as an artist, Simmons had no appreciative audience in St. Lucia. It is a realization which underpins both Walcott's negative remarks about St. Lucian culture (or rather, the lack of it) in "Meanings" and "Leaving School", and his own decision to seek a life abroad in a more stimulating artistic climate. Walcott would, moreover, have been disenchanted to say the least, with the people who, when Simmons became increasingly poor, turned their backs on him altogether and left him in a state which led to his suicide. Harry Simmons is portrayed therefore in Another Life as both victim and martyr.

articulation of identity that the major differences between the playwrights can be discerned. These differences are rooted in their respective colonial and personal histories, and reflect the multifacetedness of British colonialism itself which, while establishing many correlatives between Nigeria and St. Lucia as British colonies, also marked fundamental differences. These differences are important to note for they set the stage for what can be seen as characteristic responses colonials like Soyinka and Walcott are almost predicated to make, in re-articulating identity.

Although his mother took pains to warn Soyinka against the "superstition"/ "black magic" of the indigenous world, and the missionary wall served as a demarcation of territories, the playwright grew up aware that the distinction between this indigenous Yoruba world and his own was decidedly blurred. For despite her Christianity, Wild Christian did/could not reject the indigenous forces which continued to exert a strong presence around her. She believed in spirits, describing her brother Sanya to be an oro (or woodland spirit), and her fear of sorcery itself was an acknowledgement of her belief in these elements. Within the missionary compound itself the Christian bookseller and his wife performed traditional rites to appease their Abiku child, and when the Soyinka children were ill native medicine was administered to them. Soyinka saw his father too straddle both worlds, for although westernized, Samuel Ayodele provided the link to the indigenous world of Isara, and once there, slept in

his father's hut away from his family and relinquished gestures of his urban, westernized milieu. As Soyinka described, "From the moment of our arrival in Isara he ceased, in effect, to be part of the Aké family, the Mr and Mrs ended and he moved back into the Isara fold, and the obligations of his hometown." (Aké, p.144). His father's conduct would be an example to the young Soyinka then, that it was possible to lay claim to both the indigenous and western worlds. His mother's family too would give Soyinka a similar example, for as James Gibbs noted, in the course of its missionary activity the Ransome-Kutis had "composed music which fused Yoruba and European traditions"³⁸, adapting hymns into forms the Egba people could directly relate to, making them more accessible and popular. It was evidence that Soyinka's maternal family did not turn its back altogether on its indigenous traditions, but sought rather, to amalgamate native and western forms that, as a colonized family, was its dual inheritance.

That such indigenous traditions continued to exert a strong influence on Soyinka's family was itself proof of the resilience of its world which flourished particularly in rural areas, despite the colonization of West Africa. A number of factors contributed to its preservation, although it would be naive to claim that it evolved and functioned in isolation to the colonial presence in the country. Chinua Achebe's novels Things Fall Apart (1958) and Arrow of God (1964), and Soyinka own Death and the King's Horseman show that traditional societies were themselves

³⁸ James Gibbs, Wole Soyinka, p.2.

in transition at the time of the colonial encounter, and that colonial authority dictated the direction the changes in these societies would take. For example, indigenous political institutions were allowed to function, but contingent on certain conditions such as the abolition of human sacrifice and certain forms of capital punishment the European found repugnant, the introduction of taxes and a cash crop economy designed to stimulate production.³⁹ Moreover, because of the geographical expanse of the region, its difficult interior terrain and its diseases such as malaria and typhoid which claimed scores of European lives until the early 20th Century, (West Africa was known as the "white man's grave"), the British colonial authorities were reluctant to man the area themselves. Consequently they decided on the pragmatic policy of governing the people through existing traditional hierarchies which had many advantages, not the least of which was putting the onus of collecting taxes, and even policing the area, on the village chieftains.⁴⁰

It is such a system of indirect rule that we come across in Aké when Soyinka describes the crisis over taxes the Egba women consider unjust and refuse to pay. For when the issue comes to a head, their union makes representations first to the

³⁹ Michael Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule, p.169.

⁴⁰ See G.O.Olusanya, "The Nigerian Civil Service in the Colonial Era: A Study of Imperial Reactions to Changing Circumstances," Studies in Southern Nigerian History ed.B.I. Obichere (London:Frank Cass, 1982).pp.175-200.

Alake at Abeokuta, and it is only when things get out of hand in the Alake's compound that the British District Officer appears on the scene. Again at Isara, we see its titled head, the Odemo, hold court and command the respect of the villagers in a continuation of traditional practices. The existence of such traditional structures meant of course that ancient religious rites and customs continued to be practised, and collective mythic memories of various tribes and cultures continued to be preserved. For Soyinka they provided, as constructs of collective philosophies, tangible evidence of a sophisticated, alter/native vision to that of the colonizer to which he could turn, to both integrate with his own society from which class and educational privileges had alienated him, and rehabilitate his Yoruba identity vis-a- vis the larger English speaking world.

It was his grandfather whom he idealized, and Isara, that represented for Soyinka this alternative tradition at its best, so that although his autobiography is entitled Aké, it is only in relation to life at Isara that his world at Aké is explained and falls into place. For it is in Isara that Soyinka understands the real world of the Ijebu market women - their poverty and the long distances they travel on foot to market - who appear to him only as mysterious and "shadowy guests" when at Aké as they arrive in the night, cook their native foods which smell irresistible and converse in a mysterious tongue before falling asleep. Again, it is at Isara that he is exposed to traditions of craftsmanship which make a lasting impression on him. He

spends an afternoon watching silver and goldsmiths at work, awed by "the silence and purity of their motions." (Aké, p.131) Most importantly perhaps, it is at Isara that he undergoes tribal initiation rites which, however painful, seal his bond with its world.

Walcott on the other hand, a product of a far more deracinated history than Soyinka's, grew up feeling that he had no such alter/native tradition and described himself as "a child without history", one who grew up in "an absence of ruins". It is a position which reflects the extent to which the Caribbean was damaged by colonialism which imposed on the region and its people a history of violence and deracination, marred by genocide, slavery and indenture which was all but slavery in name.

The West Indies first came to the attention of Europe in 1492 with Columbus's accidental voyage of "discovery" when, en route to Cipangu and mainland China, he beached on an island he called San Salvador, now known as Watling Island.⁴¹ Looking for economic wealth by exploiting the resources of the region, the Spanish government of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella who had sponsored Columbus's trip, encouraged their people to colonize the islands. On 23rd September 1493, twelve to fifteen thousand colonists set sail from Spain to Hispaniola (Haiti) in seventeen ships, with six months supply of food, wine, farming implements

⁴¹ F.R.Augier et al, The Making of the West Indies, pp.4-9.

and seeds.⁴² Once on Caribbean soil, there then followed inevitable clashes between these colonists and the indigenous Arawak and Carib inhabitants of the archipelago⁴³ - confrontations which were brutally settled with the genocide of the native people by the Europeans. Those natives who did manage to survive were forced into working on the colonists' plantations, but were eventually almost exterminated as they succumbed to European diseases such as smallpox to which they had no immunity, and buckled under cruel working conditions. Requiring cheap labour to work their plantations thereafter, these settlers then imported mainly from the West coast of Africa vast numbers of slaves (two million were transported to the Anglophone Caribbean alone during the 18th century⁴⁴), who began to constitute the majority of the West Indian population as it is manifest today.

Already deprived of an evolving indigenous tradition with the decimation of its native inhabitants, the West Indies was populated then by deracinated African slaves whose alienation was further compounded by a plantocracy which, as precaution against the forming of group consciousness and consequent rebellion, separated tribesmen and women onto different plantations, forbade

⁴² Ibid., p.9.

⁴³ For a discussion on the ideology that informed these European classifications of Arawak and Carib, and how they came to be absorbed into European colonial discourse, see Peter Hulme, Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797 (London:Methuen,1986), Chapter 2.

⁴⁴ Louis James, The Islands in Between (London:Oxford University Press, 1968), p.3.

them to marry and meted out harsh punishment for any "rebelliousness" in a bid to demoralize and bring them into line. Forcibly transported through the horrors of the middle passage, these African slaves were in any case a **transplanted** population devoid of their traditional hierarchies, artifacts and other symbols of the socio-religious structures on which their cultures were based. With no cultural symbols of the Carib age to go on (for archaeological studies of the period and its people were not carried out systematically until relatively recently), or monuments of African cultures, or European for that matter, because the European mission in these territories being purely mercantilist, none of the Renaissance treasures of science, art, music etc. held in colonial metropolises found **their** way to the colonies, Walcott, schooled in European standards to quantify culture according to architectural monuments, paintings, ceramics, and hieroglyphs etc. would describe the Caribbean as a "history-less" world and himself as "a child without history". (AL, p.285)

Walcott's position also reflects however the extent of his own cultural colonization which deprived him of appreciating his African heritage in any positive way. For although severely undermined by the slave enterprise, there were elements of African traditions which survived the middle passage and on Caribbean soil, modified to suit the new environment, but as one form or another of African folk culture, religion and art nevertheless. The origin of obeah men and women in Jamaica for

instance is explained as a continuing function of African priests and priestesses. And although a number of slaves were converted to Christianity once in the Caribbean, in reality, as many continued to worship their African gods in the guise of Catholic saints, before long, a far reaching Afro-Catholic syncretism was established in which certain saints were identified with certain orisas and worshipped accordingly. Recent studies also show that many African languages such as Twi (the language of the Ashanti), Yoruba, Kikongo, Hausa, Fon, Mahi etc. exist in various lexical forms and are spoken in varying degrees of competence throughout the Caribbean today.⁴⁵ Moreover, the calypso, carnival rituals such as stick fighting, masquerades, and the rhythms of jazz and blues etc. have their roots in African folk traditions. Isolated within his westernized milieu however, Walcott could not relate to these African traditions in a positive way. He began to despise his black self and look upon the St. Lucian majority as "philistines", considering only his own family and friends pursuing western cultural interests "a circle of **self-civilizing** courteous people in a poverty ridden, cruelly ignored colony living by their own certainties." (my emphasis)⁴⁶ He would yearn to be white and belong wholly to the colonizer's tradition. A verse from Another Life describes,

The moon came to the window and stayed there.
He was her subject, changing when she changed,

⁴⁵ Maureen Warner Lewis, "The African Impact on Language and Literature in the English-Speaking Caribbean," Africa and the Caribbean: The Legacies of a Link eds. Margaret E. Graham and Frank W. Knight (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1979), pp. 101-23.

⁴⁶ Derek Walcott, "Meanings," p. 45.

from childhood he'd consider palms

ignobler than imagined elms,
 the breadfruit's splayed
 leaf coarser than the oak's,
 he had prayed
 nightly for his flesh to change,
 his dun flesh peeled white by her lightning
 strokes!

(AL, pp.148-9)

That Walcott ached at this stage to belong fully to the colonizer's tradition even when it meant self-negation, reflects the extent to which his own family circle was culturally colonized. In this respect, his background is radically different to Soyinka's. Soyinka was constantly exposed to debate on the injustices of the colonial enterprise. Daodu, for all his contact with high level colonial authority was critical of the colonizer's double standards. He recognized the colonizer's contempt for the African in the rule which forbade African schoolboys to have pockets in their shorts unlike their British counterparts to prevent them, presumably, from stealing for instance, and told Soyinka that he would never send his sons to a school run by white men for "They try to destroy character in our boys." (Aké, p.227) Moreover, participating as a messenger between groups of women in the rebellion over taxes, Soyinka saw for himself the unjust arm of the colonizer, and was witness to many adult debates on the injustices of the colonial presence and rule in Africa.

Walcott on the other hand was not privy to such debate and

consequently accepted the colonizer's version of history uncritically. He admitted in fact that awareness of colonial manipulations came only much later in life, for as he wrote in the Trinidad Sunday Guardian, "one of the subtler shocks that comes to the schoolboy **later in life**, (my emphasis) especially if like the schoolboys of my generation he was taught history as adventure literature interrupted by treaties, is the political advantage to which such teaching can be put."⁴⁷ He would, in an interview with Selden Rodman, also recall singing "Britannia Rules the Waves", "just as fervently as a million other black children. Including the line "Britons never, never shall be slaves", and added, "Amazing isn't it, that we didn't feel any contradiction there!"⁴⁸

The contradictions that constitute Walcott's post-colonial identity could not, as the playwright realized, be wished away. Like Soyinka, Walcott felt the need to negotiate these contradictions through his work, re-articulating identity, and claiming a history of his own. He resolved to achieve this by "Naming" the Caribbean which had hitherto been for him a "virginal, unpainted world" in which "whole generations (had) died, unchristened". (AL, p.195.) He would embark therefore with his artist friend Dunstan St.Omer on an Adamic enterprise, pledging not to leave St.Lucia until they had fulfilled "Adam's

⁴⁷ Derek Walcott, "A Work of Passion, but still Valuable," Trinidad Sunday Guardian, 11th June 1961. p.5.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Selden Rodman, Tongues of Fallen Angels, pp.252-3.

task of giving things their names". (AL, p.294)

The extent of Walcott's commitment to this act of naming the Caribbean, its landscape, people, flora and fauna can be seen in his very choice of vocation. For the playwright had at first pursued interests in both creative writing and painting. Edward Baugh noted in fact that "if either had the edge at the beginning, it was painting."⁴⁹ Gradually Walcott realised however that the medium of painting would not permit him to fulfil his Adamic ambitions satisfactorily. He asked himself,

Where did I fail? I could draw,
I was disciplined, humble, I rendered
the visible world that I saw
exactly, yet it hindered me, for
in every surface I sought
the paradoxical flash of an instant
in which every facet was caught
in a crystal of ambiguities
(AL, p.200)

so that eventually, he came to realize that he "lived in a different gift,/its element metaphor". (AL, p.201) As Pamela Mordecai points out, "Paint could not handle Walcott's twin inheritance, could not permit escape from one point in history to the totality of the lived experience...It is not, therefore, that Walcott cannot succeed as a painter. It is rather that paint and the exigencies of interpreting reality in that medium cannot express the range and complexity of the insight of his heightened imagination, nor construe it to his satisfaction. Walcott's medium would have to be the word, itself a product of historical and cultural contact, reflecting and containing

⁴⁹ Edward Baugh, Memory as Vision, p.12.

history's meanings".⁵⁰ Choosing to be a creative writer - a vocation which, as Samuel O.Asein points out, was suspect in West Indian societies of the time, (the roll of scholars at Walcott's school, St.Mary's College, registered for instance those who had made their mark as doctors, lawyers and engineers, but not artists and writers)⁵¹, Walcott was choosing to address his coloniality, and in doing so, negotiate the tensions of race, class and history with determination.

As sites in which their authors re-articulate identity, re-writing the histories of their people and cultures, the works of Soyinka and Walcott are inextricably entwined with colonial history. Their strategies for negotiating the contradictions that constitute them are again implicated in this history. For although it must be borne in mind that these strategies do not live in clear cut opposition to each other (incorporating as they do the colonial inheritances common to both playwrights), they emphasize nevertheless aspects which are/**must** be different for being the tropes of different individuals in different colonial contexts.

Having recourse to a community whose mythic memory and

⁵⁰ Pamela Mordecai, "A Crystal of Ambiguities": Metaphors for Creativity and the Art of Writing in Derek Walcott's Another Life," World Literature Written in English 27, no.1, Spring 1987. pp.98 & 100.

⁵¹ Samuel O.Asein, "The Growth and Reputation of Derek Walcott as a Playwright," Ph.D thesis, University of Ibadan, 1974. p.27.

collective world view survived the colonial encounter, (helped no doubt by a relatively short period of colonization which spanned just 60-70 years), giving him a positive alter/native tradition of his own, Soyinka chooses to reconnect with his Yoruba roots. Walcott on the other hand, victim of a far more violent and deracinated saga, names his Caribbean world through European metaphors. Anna in Another Life is idealized in relation to European models - Anna Karenina, Ann Moore, Ann Hathaway and Anna Akhmatova. The Caribs' heroic stand against the European colonists at Sauteurs, Grenada in 1651 is linked with the stand by the Spartans against Xerxes at Thermopylae in 480 B.C. Harry Simmons's retreat to village life at Babonneau is seen in relation to Gaugin's rejection of urban life for the pastoral in Tahiti.

But at its best, Walcott's Adamic endeavour also led him to look for the positive in his own black history. Relating the Caribs' stand at Sauteurs to the one at Thermopylae Walcott would seek not only to enter it into the annals of world history, but also celebrate the defiance with which the defeated Caribs committed mass suicide by jumping into the sea rather than suffer ignominious capture, similar to George Lamming's use of the incident in Of Age and Innocence when the boys recall it as a symbol of moral courage during San Cristobal's struggle for independence.⁵² Through acceptance of his own St. Lucian linguistic

⁵² George Lamming, Of Age and Innocence (London:Allison & Busby, 1981), p.99.

environment Walcott would celebrate too the tenacity of the West Indian peasant in a play like Sea at Dauphin, dramatizing a positive history in the survival of the oppressed. He would seek to fuse folk, theatrical, musical and literary elements of Europe and Africa in Ti-Jean and His Brothers, forging a syncretism which, to him, was a metaphor for the cross-fertilization that the West Indies is today.

Both Soyinka and Walcott are self-conscious syncretists, whose work, it will also be the burden of this thesis to show, points to the strengths as well as limitations of syncretism as metonymic of the post-colonial experience. We have seen how Soyinka's parents straddled both indigenous and western worlds, setting their son an example of how coloniality can, or has to be negotiated in terms of a duality and hybridity. Walcott worked towards a syncretic language and forms in his work from Sea at Dauphin (1954) onwards. Acknowledging such moves by contemporary post-colonial writers, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin stated in The Empire Writes Back,

The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms. Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognize cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group "purity", and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilized. Nationalist and Black criticism have demystified the imperial processes of domination and continuing hegemony, but they have not in the end offered a way out of the historical and philosophical impasse. Unlike these models,

the recent approaches have recognized that the strength of post-colonial theory may well lie in its inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies. This view provides a framework of "difference on equal terms" within which multi-cultural theories, both within and between societies, may continue to be fruitfully explored.⁵³

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin are surely correct when they point to the fallacy of notions of "collective purity" which are made untenable by post-colonial cultural hybridity. The strengths of post-colonial theory and writing may well lie in this **essential** syncretism or hybridity which cannot be effaced. However, the move from the truism of post-colonial cultural mixing to the "acceptance of difference on equal terms" is suspect. In fact, what the much-vaunted notions of hybridity and syncretism obscure is precisely the **unequal** confrontation of the elements that comprise hybridity. The danger then of uncritically celebrating post-colonial hybridity is that it effaces post-coloniality as a site of struggle in which "hybridity" reflects mainly the domination of certain forms over others. What becomes necessary therefore, is analysis of **how** this hybridity/syncretism privileges elite culture as well as how the possibility of resisting such hegemony produces conflict and contradiction. The thesis will discuss then the works of Soyinka and Walcott as sites in which the playwrights confront, and continually negotiate these demands of their post-coloniality.

⁵³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back (London:Routledge, 1989), pp.36-7.

CHAPTER 2MYTH AS METAPHOR: SOYINKA'S ALTER/NATIVE TRADITION**1**

In resisting imposed images of colonial identity, African writers have always looked to rehabilitating indigenous cultures as alternative traditions to the colonizer's within which they can assert identity and function in society on their own terms. As Kofi Awoonor stated, this has required those who have been made "to veer away from the internal structure...of (their) society" because of their colonial upbringing, to make "a very conscious effort to go back to this organism."¹ Such a return would enable them to understand the complexity of its constructs in the first place, and, in Helen Tiffin's words, "reveal a new wholeness, based on, if not entirely composed of, the resuscitated materials of the original culture."²

For Soyinka, the tropes for such a re-connection lie in the myths and rituals of his Yoruba culture, particularly in those of Ogun, Yoruba god of war, iron, craftsmanship and the road. He

¹ Kofi Awoonor, In Person ed. Karen L. Morrel (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), p.147.

² Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism and the Re-habilitation of Post-Colonial History," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 23, no.1, 1988. p.175.

sees in them metaphors for human nature and patterns of history which have relevance for contemporary experience. He sought to establish this in early essays like "From a Common Back Cloth" (1963), "And After the Narcissist?" (1966) and the seminal "The Fourth Stage" (1963).³

But it is in Myth, Literature and the African World⁴ that he elaborately narrativizes the myth of Ogun, extracting from it principles with which he defines a "Yoruba" consciousness, and constructs a dramatic theory for his tragedies, rooting them in an indigenous episteme which he posits as an alternative to the colonizer's. As such it is a crucial narrativization and I will describe its salient features⁵, before going on to discuss Myth as a site in which Soyinka addresses both coloniser and "alienated" African, constructing indigenous cultural and

³ Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage," in The Morality of Art: Essays Presented to G.Wilson Knight by his Colleagues and Friends ed. D.W.Jefferson (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul,1969),pp.119-34. G.Wilson Knight was Soyinka's professor at the University of Leeds when the playwright read for a B.A. and M.A.Degree (which he did not complete) from 1953-57. It is in this essay that Soyinka sets down for the first time a detailed theory of tragic drama based on principles of the Ogun myth and ritual.

⁴ Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

⁵ Myth, Literature and the African World includes an amended "The Fourth Stage" which is the version I will be drawing on in this thesis, because as Soyinka himself admitted, the version published in The Morality of Art contains many ambiguities and typing errors as it was printed from a draft, Soyinka being imprisoned by the Nigerian government soon after it was written. (See Myth, p.ix.) In discussing Soyinka's dramatic theory I will however be drawing on the other chapters of Myth as well, for they are essays in which the playwright clarifies and elaborates on the central concerns in "The Fourth Stage".

artistic paradigms through which he re-articulates his post-colonial identity.

Soyinka's narrative in Myth, Literature and the African World tells us that the Yoruba gods once lived in "complementarity" with men, signifying not only a fraternity between gods and men but also the need, in Obiajuru Maduakor's words, "for the gods to continually experience the human in themselves and a parallel urge in man to reassume his divine essence."⁶ An estrangement between the gods and men occurred however⁷, resulting in an alienation which Soyinka sees at the matrix of all tragedy. For it meant not only the separation of gods and men, but man from his true potential, and the gods themselves from their own divine essence as Yoruba gods possess an innate humanity and are prone therefore to the same weaknesses as man.

This estrangement/alienation Soyinka names "the chthonic realm" or transitional gulf, which Ogun crossed by hacking a road through it with an axe in order to regain "complementarity"

⁶ Obiajuru Maduakor, "Soyinka as a Literary Critic," Research in African Literatures 17, no.1, Spring 1986.p.8.

⁷ Various reasons have been given for this estrangement. Bolaji E.Idowu states, "The story of what happened is variously told. One story is that a greedy person helped himself to too much food from heaven; another that a woman with a dirty hand touched the unsoiled face of heaven.The motif is all one - man sinned against the Lord of Heaven and there was immediately raised a barrier which cut him off from the unrestricted bliss of heaven." See Olodumare:God in Yoruba Belief (London:Longman,1962), p.22.

Soyinka attributes Ogun's unique success in bridging the gulf to the power of the god's will. He stated in "The Fourth Stage", "nothing but the will (for that alone is left untouched) rescues being from annihilation within the abyss." (Myth, p.150) According to Soyinka, a similar will power is of foremost importance to the tragic protagonist, for it constitutes his greatest asset in crossing the abyss of transition like the god before him, seeking integration with his environment and aspiring to a "divinity" which is within his grasp.

The myth tells us that Ogun was offered a royal crown by the other gods as reward for his achievement, but it was an honour he refused, preferring to lead a quiet life. While wandering on earth, he came to the town of Ire where, as the god of war, he helped its people rout an enemy in battle. In gratitude the people invited him to be their king - an office he again refused but was later persuaded to accept. And then an event which Soyinka imbues with the highest significance occurred. Leading the people of Ire into battle against an enemy on another occasion, Ogun became drunk on palm wine and, unable to recognize friend from foe, slaughtered his own men on the battlefield.

For Soyinka, Ogun's act of slaying his own men emanated from a hubristic flaw in the god's nature - a hubris the playwright sees as the archetypal cause of tragedy. In this

Soyinka has been influenced by Nietzsche, whose tragic hero as delineated in The Birth of Tragedy is similar to the latter's concept of the "Superman". According to Nietzsche, tragedy is a consequence of the Apollonian/Dionysian or destructive/creative antithesis in man, the destructive emanating from a hubristic flaw in his nature. This hubris is a tragic necessity **demand**ed by "nature" for its cyclical restitution, for unnatural and violent acts fuelled by such hubris and committed against "nature" are the very ones which force it to yield its rejuvenating properties. Nietzsche asked, "how else could one force nature to surrender her (sic) secrets but by victoriously opposing her, i.e., by means of the unnatural?"⁹ "Nature", dependent on a destructive/creative principle for its regeneration compels man to commit violence with hubristic assertiveness. However, the god or man who commits such violence has to pay a penalty for the harmony he ruptures. Nietzsche states, "whoever through his (sic) knowledge, plunges nature into an abyss of annihilation, must also experience the dissolution of nature in himself."¹⁰ This penalty/dissolution constitutes tragedy.

Soyinka recognized strong parallels between Nietzsche's construct and principles contained in the myth of Ogun. For "Ogun not only dared to look into transitional essence but

⁹ Frederich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy trns. WM.A. Haussmann (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1909), p.75.

¹⁰ Ibid.

triumphantly bridged it with knowledge, with art, with vision and the mystic creativity of science - a total and profound hubristic assertiveness that is beyond any parallel in Yoruba experience." (Myth,p.157) And yet, as "exaction for (that) basic victory over the transitional guardians of the gulf" (Myth,p.151), the god was compelled again into a cyclic hubristic invasion against "nature", the result of which was the tragic slaughtering of his men at Ire, resulting in turn, in his further alienation from man.

Proof of Ogun's comprehension of the tragedy he was protagonist in lies, for Soyinka, in the difference between Ogun and Obatala. In the Yoruba pantheon, Obatala has responsibility for moulding human beings into whom the final breath of life is given by Olodumare, the supreme Yoruba deity. According to Yoruba myth, when drunk on palm wine one day, Obatala had, with an unsteady hand, inadvertently created "deformities" - the crippled, the blind, albinos etc. Horrified at his mistake, Obatala forbade his followers to drink palm wine which had been the cause of his error - a reaction which Soyinka sees as entirely in keeping with the god's character. For Obatala is a passive god who finds expression in resolution. He is, as Soyinka describes, "the placid essence of creation" (Myth,p.141), whereas Ogun is "the embodiment of challenge, the Promethean instinct in man, constantly at the service of society for its full self-realization." (Myth,p.30) It is a difference embodied in fact in the deities' respective shrines. Obatala's is housed in

a sedate white and blue building while Ogun's stands outdoors, unconfined¹¹ - the dwelling of a macho, aggressive god as opposed to an old and passive one. Recognizing the **necessity** of his tragic and violent act for the rejuvenation of "nature" then, Ogun continues to enjoy palm wine with his followers.

This refusal on Ogun's part to play safe by avoiding palm wine is proof to Soyinka not only of the god's understanding of the cyclic needs of "nature", but also his spirit of leadership. Ogun is in fact looked upon in Yoruba society as an initiator. Bolaji Idowu wrote in Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief that the god is regarded as a "pioneer in the literal sense of one who goes in advance to prepare the road for others...it is believed also that Ogun makes the way smooth for the divinities in their spiritual encounters with the world of men and that he also opens the way for material and spiritual prosperity for his worshippers."¹² Ogun gains this by being, like Nietzsche's tragic hero, an antagonistic, aggressive force, challenging "nature" in order to bring about a new order. According to Soyinka, this destructive/ creative principle is deeply embedded in the Yoruba world view, so that "good and evil are not measured in terms of offences against the individual or even the physical community, for there is knowledge from within the corpus of Ifa oracular wisdom that a rupture is often simply one aspect of the

¹¹ Ketu Katrak, Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy (Westport Connecticut:Greenwood Press Inc.,1986),p.118.

¹² Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare,p.86.

destructive-creative unity, that offences even against nature may be part of the exaction by deeper nature from humanity of acts which alone can open up the deeper springs of man and bring about a constant rejuvenation of the human spirit." (Myth, p.156)

It is out of the religious ritual which dramatizes this myth of Ogun that Soyinka constructs a theory of Yoruba tragic drama, exploring the relationship between ritual and revolutionary/social consciousness. As Mircea Eliade stated, in ritual one re-enacts "fabulous, exciting, significant events, once again (witnessing) the creative deeds of the Supernatural... What is involved is not a commemoration of mythical events but a reiteration of them. The protagonists of the myth are made present, one becomes their contemporary."¹³ For Soyinka, the participants in Ogun's ritual are aware at all times as they re-enact the god's rite of passage through the "chthonic realm", of the significance of the drama they are engaged in. The stage on which the rite is performed becomes for them "the ritual arena of confrontation (representing) the symbolic chthonic space" (Myth, p.3) which Ogun bridged to gain complementarity with man. "Yoruba tragic consciousness" is, according to the playwright, the awareness amongst the ritual participants/audience of the parallel between the ritual protagonist's actions and the god's journey through this transitional abyss. It is tragic because both the content and form in such ritual (as Ketu Katrak points

¹³ Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality trns. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p.19.

out "in a ritual act, form and content merge because the very enactment of a ceremony is its form"¹⁴) tell of alienation and sacrifice.

For Soyinka, the rite, when translated into material reality, becomes a metaphor for social action. It is useful at this point to turn to his poem Idanre, where this link between the personal and broader communal experience is explored by him for the first time. In its preface Soyinka states that the poem was "born of two separate halves of the same experience", the first being a pilgrimage to the rockhills of Idanre where Ogun is supposed to have lived on coming down to earth, and the second, a walk through woods on the outskirts of Molete Soyinka impulsively embarked on, after a night of disquiet, during which he had lingered, in his words, "on unresolved sensations of my first climb up Idanre." (Idanre, p.57) The poem was completed by nightfall that same day, for on that walk, the "pattern of awareness" in which parallels between principles contained in the Ogun myth and his own socio-political history which had only tentatively impinged on Soyinka's mind when writing A Dance of the Forests (1960) had been clarified.

Soyinka stated, "in the human context of my society, Idanre has made abundant sense...the bloody origin of Ogun's pilgrimage has been, in true cyclic manner most bloodily re-enacted." (Idanre, p.58) For soon after the completion of the poem, the

¹⁴ Ketu Katrak, Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy, p.31.

conflicts and pressures that contributed to the Nigerian civil war, which had already gathered apace when Soyinka walked up Idanre, erupted into a full blown war in which the town of Idanre itself became isolated when its bridge was blown up. Soyinka recognized in these signs and the carnage of the war that followed, significant parallels to the patterns of alienation and destruction narrated in the Ogun myth. He was also aware that in the thunder-storm that raged on the night of his pilgrimage was an image of harvest, the rainstorm being the first in a season ushering in a harvest in which

the first fruits rose from subterranean hoards
 First in our vision, corn sheaves rose over hill
 Long before the bearers, domes of eggs and flesh
 Of palm fruit, red, oil black, froth flew in sun
bubbles
 Burst over throngs of golden gourds...

(Idanre, p. 85)

Soyinka became aware then that destruction is complemented by creation, and that the myth and ritual of Ogun contain metaphors with which one can read patterns of history including, for instance, the disruptive colonial encounter. The participants in the Ogun ritual would then be similarly aware of the parallels between the destructive/creative dictates enacted and reinforced in the ritual, and those governing their own lives.

As the destructive/creative process is initiated by a violation for which a sacrifice must be made in atonement, Soyinka realized that within the ritual arena, it is this element of sacrifice with its intrinsically tragic qualities that has the

greatest impact on communal consciousness. The ritual participants would be aware that the actions of the protagonist, as he initiates the destructive/creative process, are undertaken on behalf of the community to the extent that the protagonist himself submits to "a loss of individuation" during the course of the rite. The welfare of the protagonist becomes inseparable from that of the ritual participants/ audience, and as far as Soyinka is concerned, the drama ceases to exist if the community/audience does not supply the protagonist with a collective energy, conveyed in the ritual through choric participation, with which he then challenges the inimical forces of the "chthonic space".¹⁵ Translated into material, every day reality, such ritual/drama serves then as a powerful metaphor for revolutionary action, arousing the consciousness of a community/audience as it learns of precepts such as the destructive/creative rubric and the sacrifice necessary for the creation of a new order.

2

The construction in Myth of indigenous cultural and artistic paradigms through which Soyinka re-articulates identity is addressed to both coloniser/1st world readers and "alienated"

¹⁵ Wole Soyinka, "Drama and the African World-View," Exile and Tradition ed. Rowland Smith (London:Longmans, 1979), p.176.

Africans, who are, according to the playwright, blind to the dictates of their own culture and society. (Myth, p.xi) Recouping his culture from the negativity assigned it by the coloniser, showing how indigenous myths and rituals contain metaphors that can be translated into present historical experience and offer therefore a sophisticated alternative world-view which has universal relevance, Soyinka was/is engaged then in a project of giving back to the people what was taken away from them by the coloniser in the first place.

Soyinka was also concerned in Myth however with defending his own position as one who has "long been preoccupied with the process of apprehending (his) own world in its full complexity." (Myth, p.ix) For by the time he came to write Myth, Soyinka was under attack by many critics for his unrelenting emphasis on mythology as containing the appropriate paradigms for human experience, impatient with what they perceived as insufficient attention on his part to the socio-economic-political forces governing society.¹⁶ I shall in this section attempt to read Soyinka's de-colonizing project in Myth with

¹⁶ Soyinka cites the UNESCO conference on the Influence of Colonialism on African Culture, and the 6th Pan-African Congress, Dar es Salaam, 1974, as gatherings at which such criticism was voiced. See Myth, p.x. These conferences took place against the backdrop of the overthrow of Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and the peasant revolts of Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, and the major theme throughout the 6th Pan-African Congress was the appropriateness of Marxist models of economic and cultural production for the African continent. See Horace Campbell ed., Pan-Africanism: The Struggle Against Imperialism and Neo-Colonialism, Documents of the Sixth Pan-African Congress 1974 (Toronto: Afro-Carib Publications, 1975).

some of this criticism in mind, and also discuss how the metaphors contained in the Ogun myth as Soyinka narrativizes them, translate into the post-colonial experience.

In a lecture Soyinka delivered at the University of Ifé in November 1982 entitled "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and Other Mythologies"¹⁷, Soyinka attacked his critics - particularly the African ones - for imposing a Marxist, material theory which had originated in the West onto an African context, without taking the trouble to root their studies in the particular sociology of the African community which produced the culture and literature they were studying in the first place.¹⁸ For while aware that class/power structures operate universally, "what remains permanently contestable" Soyinka stated, "is the universality of the concepts and values attaching to each group."¹⁹ Broad generalizations on the African bourgeoisie, or

¹⁷ Later published as "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and Other Mythologies," Black Literature and Literary Theory ed. Henry Louis Gates jnr. (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 27-57. This essay is much more useful in terms of Soyinka's defence against his critics, because in Myth the playwright fails to respond to criticisms of his work seriously, resorting merely to hurling acerbic remarks at such "Marxist" critics. (See Myth, p.x) "The Critic and Society" on the other hand offers a studied response to the criticism Soyinka was under, and has bearing therefore on his assertions in Myth as well.

¹⁸ Soyinka also complained in Myth: "the new idealogue has never stopped to consider whether or not the universal verities of his new doctrine are already contained in, or can be elicited from the world-view and social structures of his own people." The playwright set out to prove in Chapters 2 and 3 of Myth, discussing the works of Sembene Ousmane, Yambo Oulougum, Denis Brutus and Ayi Kwei Armah amongst others, that many works of African literature proved in fact that they could.

¹⁹ Wole Soyinka, "The Critic and Society," p.48.

even the working class for that matter as categories which coincide perfectly with European equivalents were, for the playwright, unacceptable, for each group within its own geographical region, cultural community and different history subscribes to world-views and needs different to the other. African critics had been "trapped" then "into transporting the petit-bourgeois signs and iconography of their mentor culture into a universal culture."²⁰

The demands of race-retrieval and cultural rehabilitation were/are such that paradoxically, Soyinka has himself in Myth fallen into the trap of making the simplistic generalizations he accused his critics of making. Throughout Myth and essays like "Drama and the African World-View" we have assertions by Soyinka of an "authentic" African world encompassing an over-arching, homogeneous "African" sensibility which is posited against an equally homogenized European entity. Such cohesiveness is gained of course by ignoring, or forcing together, diversity of peoples, languages, tribes, religious beliefs and social structures not only within the African and European continents but within each community itself, and is therefore, a dangerous myth. At the core of such a claim of unanimity is moreover an assumption that, as Paulin Hountondji stated, "there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies but only collective systems

²⁰ Ibid., p.34.

of belief."²¹

It is interesting to note that Soyinka depicts such diversity in his plays. In The Strong Breed which dramatizes the conflict within Eman as he faces his hereditary duty as a sacrificial scapegoat/ carrier of the community's evils, we are shown that within Yoruba territory itself purification rites take different forms. While in Eman's home village the carrier is honoured for his role in the cleansing of his community, in Jaguna's village this figure is a vilified and humiliated scapegoat. Again, in The Lion and the Jewel, the Westernized urban milieu the school teacher Lakunle is enamoured of, and the rural, more traditional culture Baroka, the Bale of Ilujinle is rooted in, acknowledges the presence of two different ways of life in colonial Nigeria.²² And what more recognition of **individual** choice/failure than Elesin Oba's inability/refusal to fulfil his traditional obligations and commit ritual suicide in Death and the King's Horseman? Engaged however in a self-conscious construction/re-articulation of identity in Myth,

²¹ Paulin J. Hountondji, African Philosophy: Myth and Reality trns. Henri Evans with Jonathan Ree (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1983), p.60.

²² In a question-answer session held in Zimbabwe, a transcript of which was edited by James Gibbs and published as "Soyinka in Zimbabwe: A Question and Answer Session," The Literary Half-Yearly 28, no.2, July 1987, pp.50-110, Soyinka refuted the commonly held view of critics that The Lion and the Jewel deals with a "clash of cultures", with Lakunle representative of a Western ethos opposed to the Bale rooted in an indigenous one. Soyinka stated emphatically that Lakunle was a caricature and therefore not "representative" of any culture, and that in the play, the Bale was merely concerned with defending his bit of turf against encroachment from outside. pp.79-80.

Literature and the African World, which involves a forcing together, or effacement of disparate elements to achieve an identity that is cohesive and whole, Soyinka makes claims for monolithic, homogenous entities which are untenable. Nor does he analyze the mythologies and rituals of tribes and cultures other than the Yoruba although Myth sets out to be a study of the "African world". Used interchangeably, the specific Yoruba context becomes more than metonymic to Soyinka of the entire African continent.

There is a sense, however, in which my initial critique of Soyinka on the basis of his generalizing/homogenizing does not engage with his major argument. The objection that his language is insufficiently nuanced can, perhaps, be met with the insertion in his texts of some key qualifications, and the "cosmetic" inclusion of gender-sensitive language. For Soyinka's exclusion of women in Myth must be marked, as it locates in the male, whether European or Yoruba, the essence of cultural specificity. Such a qualifying project will not substantially weaken or change his thesis. The problem with Soyinka's comparative analysis of Yoruba and "Western" culture will then be reduced to the endemic difficulty in presenting any generalizable theory. For all general propositions, and particularly those that concern the complex heterogeneity that is "culture", are at best only true in a simple majority of cases, and moreover, admit to a gamut of exceptions and variations that are nevertheless useful because they remain **generally** true.

Notwithstanding the objections outlined above, which remain symptomatic throughout Soyinka's work, I will provisionally accept his argument in Myth in order to examine its efficacy in terms of the de-colonizing project the playwright is engaged in. Soyinka's argument in Myth is two-fold. The first element comprises a critique of Western aesthetic theory as inadequate to the African experience, while the second presents a Yoruba mythic discourse, as exemplified by the myth and ritual of Ogun, as singularly appropriate to this task.

Soyinka's criticism of general ("Western") aesthetic theory is that it is not able to explain satisfactorily, "certain areas of depth-experience". (Myth, p.140) This critique is irrefutable in terms of its objections against universalizing categories through which diverse and divergent experiences are made similar. A general theory generalizes on the basis of a hegemony that devalues the marginal. The "general" theory of the West inevitably colonizes the African experience by reinscribing it in terms of its own western cultural standards.

Such a criticism of the over-arching validity of European paradigms by which the coloniser assessed and categorized all Other cultures is, however, undermined by Soyinka's own claims for the universal relevance of Yoruba myth. Soyinka's predicament lies in his need to justify the Ogun myth in precisely the same generalized terms that he objects to in Eurocentric, Western

theory. The problematic a post-colonial like Soyinka, engaged in re-articulating his identity, is caught up in, is markedly evident in fact when he affirms what he has just denied, and argues for the appropriateness of Ogun to our present lives in terms of categories such as "tragedy" and "hubris" which are rooted in the Western paradigms he has just negated.

These concepts of "tragedy" and "hubris" as applied to the mythic paradigms of Yoruba culture are, moreover, stripped by Soyinka of their specific Graeco-Roman referents and simplistically appropriated in order to establish a Yoruba theory of tragedy. Soyinka stated,

Morality for the Yoruba is that which creates harmony in the cosmos, and reparation for disjunction within the individual psyche cannot be seen as compensation for the individual accident to that personality. Thus good and evil are not measured in terms of offences against the individual or even the physical community, for there is knowledge from within the corpus of Ifa oracular wisdom that a rupture is often simply one aspect of the destructive-creative unity, that offences even against nature may be part of the exaction by deeper nature from humanity of acts which alone can open up the deeper springs of man and bring about a constant rejuvenation of the human spirit. Nature in turn benefits by such broken taboos, just as the cosmos does by demands made upon its will by man's cosmic affronts. Such acts of hubris compel the cosmos to delve deeper into its essence to meet the human challenge. Penance and retribution are not therefore aspects of punishment for crime but the first acts of a resumed awareness, an invocation of the principle of cosmic adjustment. Tragic fate is the repetitive cycle of the taboo in nature, the karmic act of hubris witting or unwitting, into which the demonic will within man constantly compels him. Powerful tragic drama follows upon the act of hubris, and myth exacts this attendant penalty from the hero where he has actually emerged

victor of a conflict.

(Myth, p.156)

In this explanation of the distinctiveness of Yoruba culture, the fact that one's identity and existence is not written or deemed merely by a personal history but collective social codes is made very clear by Soyinka. Why then does the playwright appropriate the concept of tragic heroism as it applies in the Western canon which is intrinsically elitist, to explain a world-view which is supposedly collective? As it is defined in the Dictionary of Literary Terms, "tragedy (is) a calamity, disaster, or fatal event...Specifically **tragedy** is applied to a dramatic work, in prose or verse, that traces the career of a noble person whose character is flawed by some defect (jealousy, excessive ambition, pride, etc.) and whose actions cause him to break some moral precept or divine law, with ensuing downfall and destruction."²³ The term "Hubris" is defined as a "Transgression of divine command or moral law, due to ambition, overconfidence, greed, lust, or other passion or flaw in character."²⁴

The very concept of "heroism" as understood in the elite tradition of the Western canon sits uneasily within the essentially communal and anti-aristocratic matrix of the Yoruba

²³ Harry Shaw, Dictionary of Literary Terms (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), pp.381-2.

²⁴ Joseph T.Shipley ed.Dictionary of World Literary Terms (London:George Allen & Unwin, 1970), p.149.

world-view. The usual understanding of tragic flaws and divine order, in which the former upsets the latter, creating an avalanche-effect quite out of proportion with the original "flaw", has little meaning in the context described by Soyinka, in which acts of violence, penance and restitution are understood as being essential components of a cyclic reality. One yearns for a construction then of **different** dramatic paradigms on Soyinka's part when describing a theory of Yoruba tragedy, as opposed to the simple extension of existing Western ones. Such a project would be more in keeping with his argument against general aesthetic theories. For while Soyinka's contention about the limitations of "general" aesthetic paradigms is cogent, what we have in Myth is his re-enactment of the Western project which masquerades as the general paradigm, when he re-invests certain strands of Yoruba aesthetics (for its mythology is not all) with an unquestioned universality.

Constructing his own terminology would moreover, be appropriate to Soyinka's task of re-articulating identity in a manner that successfully **challenges** the coloniser's impositions of identity. For if Soyinka is to remain consistent to his critical project, he needs to historicize and question the very notions of "tragedy" and "hubris" as well as concepts like "heroism" contained in Western paradigms, rather than re-investing these notions with Yoruba explanations and examples. In this respect however, one is not simply marking an error or weakness on the part of Soyinka as an individual, but rather,

pointing to a fundamental complicity shared by post-colonials who are doomed to affirm that which they deny, and deny that which they affirm in the sense that their identities are predicated on this real contradiction.

Soyinka was, ironically, able to see in the work of the Négritude writers, the pitfalls of resisting from within the coloniser's **own** discourse, imposed images of colonial identity. The Négritude movement, initiated by Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sedar Senghor and Léon Gontran Damas amongst others who were students in Paris in the 1930s, was also a response to impositions of colonial identity, specifically the French policy of assimilation, and concerned with a reappraisal and affirmation of the culture and psyche of black people.²⁵ It was a representation of self which was however, again **inevitably** beset by the contradiction of having to affirm that which they deny, for in redeeming their identities, the writers of the early Négritude movement countered, as Soyinka stated, "one pernicious Manicheism with another." (Myth, p.138)

²⁵ The word "négritude" was first used by Aimé Césaire in Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (1939). Although Césaire's Cahier and Senghor's Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malagache de langue française (1948) are considered the trail-blazers of the Négritude movement, Léon Gontran Damas's Pigments (1937) was the first work of these to appear, which claimed the legitimate worth of "black" culture. Numerous copies of the book were burnt and destroyed by the French authorities in Damas's native Guyana when it was first published. See Daniel L. Racine ed., Léon Gontran Damas, 1912-1978: Founder of Négritude: A Memorial Casebook (Washington: University Press of America Inc., 1979), p.168.

One of the main differences between black and white people lay for Senghor in the black person's capacity for imaginative feeling, spontaneity and intuition which allowed him/her to live with an almost metaphysical intimacy with his/her environment on the one hand, and the white European's obsession with knowledge and grasp of the intellectual, devoid however, of an essential humanity on the other. "The European finds pleasure in recognizing the world through the reproduction of the object, which is designated under the name of "subject"; the African in becoming vitally acquainted with the world through image and rhythm" Senghor stated, and added, "With the European, the line of sensation leads to the heart and the head. With the African, it leads to the heart and the belly, to the root of life."²⁶

Nor was Senghor the only writer to make such claims. Studying the living conditions of a group of Maroons in Guyana for a report commissioned by the Trocadero Ethnographic Museum in Paris, Damas, who believed that these maroons, in retreating to the Inini jungles and living according to (and thereby preserving) their indigenous customs had much to offer modern Guyanians, wrote in his Retour de Guyane (1938) that "They are hard workers who intend to remain true to themselves in their way of work and enjoyment...From them one can hope for a great deal. They are natural, spontaneous, simple and proud of their

²⁶ Quoted in John Reed and Clive Wake ed.trns., Léopold Sedar Senghor, Prose and Poetry (London:Oxford University Press, 1965), p.83.

simplicity."²⁷ It is a statement which clearly reflects yet another imposition of identity - this time by these urban writer/intellectuals who imbued the Afro- Caribbean peasant with "natural", romantic and pastoral qualities which had been conferred on European peasants and rustic life by European elites during the romantic movement of the 19th Century. Césaire too would do the same. Re-writing/ appropriating Shakespeare's The Tempest as a number of colonials did at a time of decolonization (See Chapter 1 page 10), he would in his own Une Tempete (1969), strengthen the link between Caliban and nature already inscribed in Shakespeare's text, and infuse it with new significance in the context of négritude by consciously counterpoising, as Rob Nixon states, "the materialist Prospero with an animist slave empowered by a culture that coexists empathetically with nature."²⁸

These writers believed that the black colonial had a vital contribution to make to humanity as a whole by bringing to mechanized, materialistic Europe his/her "unique" qualities of sensitivity and spontaneity - a contribution which justified in turn, his/her demand/right for equality. And this is where the Négritudists were most vulnerable to attack by Soyinka. For the playwright saw in their generalizations of an animist "negro essence" the very racist tropes used by the coloniser to categorize and so oppress the black wo/man. Moreover, to assert

²⁷ Quoted in Daniel L. Racine, Léon Gontran Damas: Founder of Négritude, p.215.

²⁸ Rob Nixon, "Caribbean and African Appropriations of The Tempest," Critical Inquiry 13, Spring 1987. p.571.

identity on the basis of the **contribution** African cultures could make towards an "universal civilization" - Senghor had stated "the struggle for **négritude** must not be negation but affirmation. It must be the contribution from us, the peoples of the Sub-Saharan Africa, to the growth of **Africanity**, and beyond that, to the building of the **civilization of the Universal**" - was fundamentally flawed, for to do so was to place value on the indigenous **only in so far** as it could contribute to this "universal" civilization.²⁹ In resisting specific racist charges against the black colonial, the Négritude writers had been unable then to radically challenge the coloniser's assumptions from which these notions emanated in the first place, because those very racial stereotypes and polarities remained at the matrices of their own explanations of self. Moreover, the policy of assimilation which, ironically, the Négritude movement was a reaction to, was deeply embedded in the theory of the "reconciliation of cultures, (the) leaven of black contribution

²⁹ Quoted in John Reed and Clive Wake, Léopold Sedar Senghor, p.97. Jean-Paul Sartre picked up this idea of the contribution of Négritude to a larger socio-political movement, and developed it into a three stage movement. The first phase being imperial expansion, the second an anti-imperial force of which Négritude was a crucial part, and the third a coalition of workers from all over the world uniting against capitalist oppression. Soyinka commented, "As for the pipe-dream of Sartre that it would pass through stages of development and merge itself within the context of the proletarian fight, one would have thought that it was obvious enough that Négritude was the property of a bourgeois-intellectual elite, and that...it would become little more than a diversionary weapon in the eventual emergence of a national revolutionary struggle". (Myth, p.135) It is significant that Soyinka does not, symptomatically in my view, critique Sartre, as Frantz Fanon does in Black Skin White Masks for appropriating, and thereby valuing the "black"/ négritude experience as just part of a larger and greater socio-political movement, or for accepting the notion of a homogenized "universal worker".

to the mechanistic loaf of European culture" which, as Soyinka pointed out in "The Writer in a Modern African State", "is only another evasion of the inward eye."³⁰

As has been noted, Soyinka himself homogenized African and European entities and polarized Africa versus European in essentialist ways that come close to what he attacked the Négritude writers for. For example Soyinka stated,

The serious divergences between a traditional African approach to drama and the European will not be found in lines of opposition between creative individualism and communal creativity, ...They will be found more accurately in what is a recognizable Western cast of mind, a compartmentalising habit of thought which periodically selects aspects of human emotion, phenomenal observations, metaphysical intuitions and even scientific deductions and turns them into separatist myths (or "truths") sustained by a proliferating superstructure of presentation idioms, analogies and analytical modes...

...the difference which we are seeking to define between European and African drama as one of man's formal representation of experience is not simply a difference of style or form, nor is it confined to drama alone. It is representative of the essential difference between two world-views, a difference between one culture whose very artifacts are evidence of a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths and another, whose creative impulses are directed at period dialectics.

(Myth, pp. 37-8)

What we have here is a more complex articulation of the European intellectual - African animist dialectic the Négritudists propounded. Soyinka's intention is perhaps, to pour

³⁰ Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," The Writer in Modern Africa ed. Per Westberg (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), p.20.

scorn on ("Marxist"?) critics for jargonized idiom, but it is not difficult to see that the operative metaphors in his criticism are those of the European critic who has access to complex idioms, analogies, analytical modes and who grapples with dialectics, while the African is shown to be sensitive to metaphysics, one who comprehends "irreducible truths". In another passage, attempting to mark the distinctiveness of Yoruba culture Soyinka stated,

The Yoruba is not, like European man, concerned with the purely conceptual aspects of time; they are too concretely realised in his own life, religion, sensitivity, to be mere tags for explaining the metaphysical order of his world.

(Myth, p.144)

Soyinka's claim here for the **exclusive** identification of the "concrete realization" of time with Yoruba culture is absurd, for it implies that only Yorubans are able to directly realize through their world-view, the full range of time past, present and future. There is much in common in these assertions then with the essentialist claims of the Négritude writers whom Soyinka attacked, ironically, for their manicheisms.

This marks a strand in Myth, in which Soyinka's self-conscious re-articulation of identity goads him to efface contradiction within his own indigenous culture and society, and polarize African versus European in ways that militate against the very dictates of the Yoruba world he rehabilitates, although of course he remains more faithful to its essence in his poems, novels and plays. Soyinka's own patron god, Ogun, is in fact a

deity who defies such polarities, for he is the embodiment of multiplicity, contradiction and conflict, being the god who harnessed the most elements of Orisa-nla, the supreme Yoruba deity, as he splintered into a thousand fragments when hit with a boulder hurled at him by his rebellious slave Atunda. Incorporating as many of these fragments within himself, Ogun comes nearest to the oneness of Orisa-nla. Of all Soyinka's dramatic characters, the Professor in The Road³¹ comes nearest to combining such multiplicity, for he is a figure of authority as the head of the Aksident Store, protector and leader of the layabouts, quasi-religious quester, forger, opportunist etc. The fragments that Ogun encompasses are however **inevitably** contradictory, so that the god contains within him a creative, altruistic essence as well as a bloodthirsty manic destructiveness. The Professor then is similarly both an honest pathfinder who wants the layabouts to understand the true meaning of death/the road, and at the same time, a petty forger who lives off them and even tries to steal their meagre earnings.

In delineating characters who parallel Ogun and in using the god himself as a metaphor of contrariety in his poems, plays and novels, Soyinka shows, as Biodun Jeyifo points out, that the (post-colonial) "African world" is composed of "a nexus of

³¹ Wole Soyinka, The Road in Collected Plays 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.147-232.

dynamically disparate and contradiction-ridden matrices".³² Idanre, as we have seen, in combining images of death and harvest celebrates such contrariety - the death of the wine girl in a car accident over which Ogun, as custodian of the road presides, symbolic of a tragic **prerequisite** for a bountiful harvest, for "growth is greener where/ Rich blood has spilt." (Idanre, p.65)

The Interpreters³³ is again a novel in which its characters abound in contradiction. The five Interpreters are friends who have returned to Nigeria having completed their studies abroad. They are judged in the novel to have awareness of themselves and the capacity to realize their full potential only in relation to their apprehension of their Yoruba heritage, and the precepts enshrined within it. Sekoni is the one who is most sensitive to his past and alive to its relevance in their present lives. But he stammers badly and has difficulty giving expression to his insights. Again, he is, unlike Egbo and Sagoe, considerate of women and disapproves of Egbo's sexist attitude towards the female dancer in the night-club for instance, but is himself divorced from his wife. Nor does he achieve job satisfaction, for he is prevented from realizing his potential as a civil engineer when the power house he builds at Ijioha is shut down

³² Biodun Jeyifo, "Wole Soyinka and the Tropes of Disalienation," Art, Dialogue and Outrage (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988), p.xv.

³³ Wole Soyinka, The Interpreters (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

by a corrupt boss with the connivance of the inevitable foreign expert, causing Sekoni to suffer a mental breakdown.

Out of this disappointment however, Sekoni is able to create a wooden sculpture entitled "The Wrestler" with an assuredness which makes Kola, the recognized artist among the interpreters, realize that "Unless 'The Wrestler' was one of those single once-in-a-life co-ordinations of experience and record, Sekoni was an artist who had waited long to find himself but had done so finally, and left no room for doubt." (Int, p.100) Soyinka shows that it is Sekoni's greater awareness of the dynamic principles of the Yoruba world-view, and therefore of life itself, which enables him to succeed as a sculptor. But also at play here is a reworking of the destructive/creative dictate. The sculpture is born out of disappointment over the power house, and conflict, inspiration for the work coming from a brawl at the Mayomi night-club in Ibadan, inevitably begun by Egbo - the Ogun like hubristic challenger in this case - at which Sekoni was present. (Int, p.219) Moreover, the dynamism of the sculpture itself is shown to emanate from the contradictions within it. Its torso is described as having "Taut sinews, nearly agonising in excess tension, a bunched python caught at the instant of easing out, the balance of strangulation before release, it was all **elasticity and strain...**" (my emphasis, Int, p.99)

As a symbol of such contradiction and multiplicity, Ogun can be read then as an apt metaphor for a syncretic post-

colonial experience. The multiple elements he encompasses are not moreover shown by Soyinka to exist equally in a free floating hybridity. There is always one element which dominates the other, and Ogun being an antagonistic god, it is as the aggressive, macho initiator that he is celebrated in Soyinka's work. Thus in Season of Anomy³⁴, Soyinka shows that without the activist violence of the Dentist, the kidnapped Iriyesi cannot possibly be freed, or the exploitative Cocoa Cartel destroyed. Phyllis Pollard stated, "the novel as a whole is obviously shaped along the lines of Fanon's 'literature of combat' (seeking) to develop a revolutionary ideology by creating an appropriate consciousness in Ofeyi and his acceptance of the need for armed struggle." She added, "The Dentist is there to illustrate the question posed by Fanon of how to pass from an atmosphere of violence to 'violence in action'".³⁵ While the correlatives to Fanon's work are undoubtedly there, the novel is also an artistic exploration of the paradoxical destructive/creative dictate as understood in the traditional Yoruba world. The Dentist's bond with the village of Aiyero reinforces this link with the past, and his violence is validated in the novel when both Ofeyi and Pa Ahime see chaos as a necessary prelude to what Ofeyi describes as "a new understanding of history" and Ahime as a cleansing act, purifying "our present polluted humanity". (Season, p.218) It is such

³⁴ Wole Soyinka, Season of Anomy (London: Rex Collings, 1972). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

³⁵ Phyllis Pollard, "Myth, Literature and Ideology - A Reading of Wole Soyinka's Season of Anomy," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 19, no.1, 1984. p.82.

violence that is again evoked by Soyinka in Ogun Abibimãñ. Written at a time when Mozambiquian President Samora Machel declared war on the white minority regime of Rhodesia in March 1976, it is as the god of war and iron that Ogun is celebrated in the poem, one "who to right a wrong/ Emptied reservoirs of blood in heaven".³⁶

But because the myth and ritual of Ogun encompass a cyclical reality in which destruction is always followed by restitution, and because Ogun embodies paradox, peace and resolution being within the paradigm he represents, the god himself is not shown by Soyinka as a **site of struggle** in which multiple elements constantly **contest** each other. In this sense, as a metonym for a conflictual post-coloniality, Ogun and his myth as narrativized by Soyinka, do not represent the fraught space the post-colonial inhabits as a subject brought to crisis by conflicting interests of marginality and privilege, caught between a complicity in the colonial enterprise and the need to subvert its pernicious aspects.

For Soyinka, what the Ogun ritual in particular does offer are metaphors for social/revolutionary awareness. He took pains in Myth and essays like "Drama and the African World-View" to analyze ritual as a medium which arouses social consciousness, and included, as we shall see in the following chapters,

³⁶ Wole Soyinka, Ogun Abibimãñ (London: Rex Collings, 1976), p.7.

ritualistic elements which parallel the Ogun rite in his plays as properties which would make the audience recognize correlatives between the myth of Ogun and their own social experiences, and in dictates such as the destructive/ creative rubric, a path to future action. To critics like Geoffrey Hunt who stated "one would expect a realistic philosophy of art to make social dynamics intrinsic to the form and content of a work", and found Soyinka's work to fall short of this ideal³⁷, the playwright's retort at a lecture entitled "Drama and the Revolutionary Ideal" in 1973, that to superimpose an ideology on an art form that is intrinsically revolutionary is to overburden the form³⁸, would be valid.

It is however for his relentless emphasis on mythology, and his refusal to historicize the myths that are at the very matrices of his work that Soyinka has come under constant attack by critics. Myths are historically determined in that they are products of a collective imagination which seeks not only to explain natural phenomena through them, but also preserve certain ideologies and status quos which benefit its ruling group. Michael Crowder draws attention in West Africa Under Colonial Rule to how religion, and by implication its mythology, was used in Iboland to protect trade in slaves and palm oil. Trading was

³⁷ Geoffrey Hunt, "Two African Aesthetics: Soyinka vs Cabral," Marxism and African Literature ed. George Gugelberger (London: James Currey, 1985), p.72.

³⁸ Quoted in Obiajuru Maduakor, "Soyinka as a Literary Critic," Research in African Literatures 17, no.1, Spring 1986, p.28.

done under the aegis of the Aro Ibo, guardians of the supreme oracle of Iboland which had power over most of Ibo, Ibibo and even the non-Ibo states of the Niger delta. According to Crowder, "using the religious sanction of the oracle, the Aro were able to trade, with complete security through Iboland to the coast" and that "The profits of the trade allowed them to produce arms to reinforce their spiritual authority."³⁹ Soyinka was certainly aware of such correlatives between the spiritual and material worlds. He stated in Myth, "Economics and power have always played a large part in the championing of new deities throughout human history. The struggle for authority in early human society with its prize for material advantages, social prestige and the establishment of an elite has been nowhere so intensely marked as in the function of religion", and added that "In the exploration of man's image of essence-ideal, fashioned in the shape of gods, we cannot afford to jettison our **cynical** faculties altogether. (My emphasis, Myth, p.12)

It is significant that an exploration of class/power manipulations in society, and the use of religion and its mythology to maintain power structures is, for Soyinka, essentially a cynical enterprise. What the playwright preferred to stress was that "myths arise from man's attempt to externalise and communicate his inner **intuitions**." (my emphasis, Myth, p.3) With such emphasis on metaphysics, it isn't surprising that

³⁹ Michael Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule (London: Hutchinson, 1968), p.129.

Soyinka criticized Chinua Achebe for instance, for portraying the god Ulu in Arrow of God (1969) as one completely subsumed in material, secular considerations, missing an opportunity, deliberately Soyinka suspects, "to transmit even a fraction of the immanence of the deity, and the power of the priest to divine his will." (Myth, p.88)

It is for this abiding interest in the metaphysical then that African critics in particular have felt let down by Soyinka. Abiola Irele complained that there is "evidence in all (Soyinka's) work of an insufficient attention to the objective forces that make the living tissue of history. His gaze is too intent upon the spiritual dimension of the human condition to take in the pressures of the immediate existence", and that "it ignores the fundamental fact that men are often caught in the grip of actual forces."⁴⁰ Femi Osofisan accused Soyinka of "mythopoeic narcissism" and stated that behind the playwright's "genuinely humane poise was always a plea for a reactionary or merely idealistic utopia, entangled in the false maze of a tragic cycle."⁴¹ These critics, aware that so much is tainted and oppressive in the neo-colonial societies they inhabit, look to writer/ intellectuals like Soyinka for leadership, believing the writer's responsibility to be one of investigating immediate

⁴⁰ Abiola Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology (London: Heinemann, 1981), p.210.

⁴¹ Femi Osofisan, "The Alternative Tradition: A Survey of Nigerian Literature in English since the Civil War," Presence Africane 139, 3rd quarter, 1986. p.164.

material concerns, rousing the political consciousness of the oppressed to struggle against the forces of their oppression. A writer like Soyinka who belonged for instance to an elite group such as the Mbari, which created work only for the aesthetic enjoyment of its own members, and which subscribed to a romantic view of the artist as an exceptional and solitary figure⁴² was seen then to have renounced his responsibilities in this respect.

The accusations and defence still continue today. In Art, Dialogue and Outrage (1988), Soyinka responded to Geoffrey Hunt's charges in a tart "The Autistic Hunt: Or How to Maximise Mediocrity", stating that "the writer does not acknowledge his profession as being in the economic field but in that of yarn-spinning and mythopoeitics. When this becomes an intellectual crime, it will only be after we have wiped out the intellectual parasites whose acknowledged field this is, but who expect poets and playwrights to do their work for them."⁴³ Soyinka's argument here is weak. Literary texts are inherently interdisciplinary, drawing as they do on multiple forces which operate within society. The creative writer may not employ academic language to explore material issues, but his/her work is informed by them nonetheless. Moreover, by Soyinka's own faith in tragic drama as a vehicle which arouses communal consciousness, he works in a medium that is politically very powerful. The playwright refuses

⁴² See Femi Osofisan, "The Alternative Tradition," p.168.

⁴³ Wole Soyinka, Art, Dialogue and Outrage (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988), p.301.

however to overtly discuss socio-political structures operating in society in his work. He will name dictators like Bokassa, Idi Amin and Macius Nguema, savagely caricaturing them for their tyranny and lust for power in plays like Opera Wonyosi and A Play of Giants. He will satirize corrupt politicians and false academics like Chief Winsala and Professor Oguazor in The Interpreters. But it is symptomatic that when it comes to even an overtly revolutionary novel such as Season of Anomy, although the village of Aiyero is presented (and recognized by Ofeyi) as an obvious model for the rest of the country, Soyinka ignores/refuses or is himself unclear about the ideology and system of production that operates in Aiyero, satisfied with giving the reader a vague notion of a collective commune.

Abiola Irele stated,

perhaps the most serious weakness in (Soyinka's) work...is the persistent climate of irresolution which betrays the lack of a clear sense of direction...it is not asking a writer to write a set of prescriptions, to expect to derive from his work a clear idea of what he represents beyond a merely circumstantial relevance...at the moment what (Soyinka) has to express does not strike one yet as arising from a defined groundwork of ideas to which his outlook on the world can be said to relate in a fundamental way. If Soyinka's work can be said to fit into any kind of framework of ideas at all, the best that can be found for it is a romantic anarchism, which expresses itself as an extreme attachment to the abstract ideas of the liberal individualism of the nineteenth Century European intellectual tradition. It is not clear by any means how an outlook on the world and an attitude to collective life derived from this tradition can be given a concrete and dynamic significance in the immediate African

context.⁴⁴

The impossibility of offering neat, clear-cut solutions to massive and fraught cultural, economic and socio-political problems cannot be dismissed, and the unresolved endings of some of Soyinka's plays point perhaps, to the playwright's awareness of the complexities at play rather than an inability to mark a realizable agenda. Irele accepts the fact that the creative writer's brief is not to write prescriptions for the ills of society but to depict life as it really is. But on the other hand, he also tries to compartmentalize Soyinka's attitudes and views into a single framework which mitigates against the freedom of the writer to explore in various ways and in mythic metaphors if needs be, life as s/he sees it. But in drawing attention to the fact that Soyinka's work is informed by a Eurocentric liberal humanism, Irele points to the fundamental problematic of the African post-colonial striving to define his particular experience through the coloniser's discourse. The following chapters will discuss how Soyinka's metaphors translate into contemporary experience, whether in fact Irele can be proved wrong, and how Soyinka's Yoruba culture is validated through the paradigms presented.

⁴⁴ Abiola Irele, The African Experience, p.210.

CHAPTER 3HISTORY AS NARRATIVE: A DANCE OF THE FORESTS

A Dance of the Forests¹ marks a watershed in Soyinka's development as a playwright. The first major play he wrote on returning to Nigeria after his spell in England (1954-59) as a student at the University of Leeds and play-reader at the Royal Court Theatre, London, it is a complex work containing multiple themes and dramatic forms both African and European. In England the playwright had been caught up in the ferment of European theatre in the 1950s², and the Theatre of the Absurd, Bertold Brecht and Copeck echo in the background of A Dance, transformed however by being placed in the context of Yoruba ritual and folklore.

Presenting the play at Nigeria's Independence celebrations on 1st October 1960, Soyinka used the work to explore certain socio-political issues he felt were important to address at such a significant time in the country's history, and decided to do so with theatrical metaphors drawn from Yoruba folklore and the

¹ Wole Soyinka, A Dance of the Forests in Collected Plays 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

² See Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka (London: Evans Brothers, 1971), p.7.

Ogun myth and ritual in particular.³ Revitalizing ancient Yoruba precepts for contemporary experience then, A Dance is the precursor of plays like The Strong Breed, Death and the King's Horseman and The Bacchae in which similar links are forged by Soyinka between Yoruba religious ritual and present historical reality.

Concerned with drawing attention to his reading of history as an essentially cyclical pattern of destruction and creation, Soyinka also made the structure of A Dance parallel a ritual which dramatizes a mythic **cycle**, thus making the play foreshadow works like The Interpreters in which the form of the work itself skilfully underscores its message.⁴ Recognizing its importance as a play in which dramatic form and theme interlock in a complex way for the first time in Soyinka's work, many critics have discussed A Dance.⁵ Their comments will be discussed during

³ On returning to Nigeria, Soyinka researched on African ritual and drama funded by a Rockefeller Scholarship, and A Dance would have given him his first opportunity to creatively use the indigenous material he was gathering and working on.

⁴ For a discussion of the correlatives between structure and content in The Interpreters, see Abdulrazak Gurnah, "The Interpreters: Technique as Structure," Ariel 13, no.2, 1982. pp.67-81.

⁵ See Una Maclean, "Soyinka's International Drama," Black Orpheus 15, August 1964. pp.46-51.

Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons (London: Macmillan, 1968), Chapter 1.

Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka, Chapter 2.

Peter Nazareth, Literature and Society in Modern Africa (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1972), Chapter 6.

Eldred Durosimi Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp.55-71.

Oyin Ogunba, The Movement of Transition (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975), Chapter 4.

the course of this chapter which will examine how Soyinka, using polyphonic theatrical strategies which bring to mind the Bakhtinian principle of dialogia, presents not a summation of the past but a disturbing evaluation of all that Nigerian Independence was apparently celebrating. It will also discuss how the figure of Demoke is presented by Soyinka as an Ogun like tragic protagonist whose role in society prepares an audience for future social action.

Soyinka stated that when writing A Dance he was concerned with forcing his African audiences to face the complexity of their past and learn from its lessons for the future.⁶ At a theatre workshop in Zimbabwe in November 1981 the playwright expanded,

"A Dance of the Forests was, of course, triggered by Independence, by my knowledge of the leaders who were about to take over the reins of the country. I realized that after Independence some of those new rulers were going to act exactly like

Nick Wilkinson, "Demoke's Choice in Soyinka's A Dance of the Forests," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 10, no.3, April 1976. pp.22-7.

Robert Fraser, "Four Alternative Endings to Wole Soyinka's A Dance of the Forests," Research in African Literatures 10, no.3, Winter 1979. pp.359-74.

Michael Etherton, The Development of African Drama (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1982), pp.257-68.

James Gibbs, Wole Soyinka (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp.63-70.

Ketu Katrak, Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy (Connecticut: Greenwood Press Inc., 1986), pp.138-50.

See also Commonwealth Special Issue No.1, 1989, for articles by Jacqueline Bardolph, Etienne Galle, Denise Coussy, Jane Wilkinson and Christiane Fioupou on A Dance of the Forests.

⁶ Quoted in Ketu Katrak, Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy, p.138.

their forbears did, just exploit the people. I was interested in taking another look at that history and saying: "The euphoria should be tempered by the reality of the internal history of oppression". In our society this included the slave trade, in which the middle men, who were Africans, collaborated actively! In other words, I thought that Independence should be a sobering look at history..."⁷

As Soyinka's statement implies, his intention of "(puncturing) a nostalgic idealizing of the past" as Ketu Katrak put it⁸, was against the tide of euphoric celebrations of nationhood that were taking place in Nigeria at the time. The playwright's burden was to disrupt/subvert such self-adulation and force his audience to come to terms with the negative, destructive side of its past history as well. For given Soyinka's belief in the cyclical pattern of nature, if the present moment of Independence was a positive phase, there would follow a destructive one - a vision which would sadly be realized just six years later with the carnage of the Nigerian civil war.

It is through dislocation at many levels, and a constant jamming of the expected signals that Soyinka keeps the audience uneasy and aware at all times of the suffering and sinister elements that comprise both past and present. From the beginning there is discrepancy between what is expected and what actually takes place. Forest Head, who has arranged for the exposition

⁷ Wole Soyinka, "Soyinka in Zimbabwe: A Question And Answer Session," ed. James Gibbs, The Literary Half-Yearly 28, no.2, July 1987. p.68.

⁸ Ketu Katrak, Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy, p.138.

rite which is the dance of the forest to take place, masquerades as the human Obaneji in the play. His masquerade itself is an intervention which challenges his statement that "to intervene is to be guilty of contradiction", for he knows that "nothing is ever altered." (Dance,p.17) Aroni, Forest Head's aide, informs us that the human community has organized a festive "Gathering of the Tribes" which, given the occasion on which the play was staged could parallel an Independence celebration. While the humans request the presence of illustrious ancestors at the celebration, the gods see fit to send "two spirits of the restless dead". They are the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, who are not only decrepit, mouldy and positively undistinguished, but also "linked in violence and blood with four of the living generation." (Dance,p.5) This itself is an intervention which forces acknowledgement of a violent and destructive history. For the Dead Couple were the Warrior and Wife at the court of Mata Kharibu, eight centuries earlier, in which the "living" - Rola, Demoke, Adenebi and Agboreko - too had existences as Madame Tortoise, the court poet, historian and physician respectively, and were implicated in a vicious manner in the deaths of the couple. The Dead Couple moreover break through the soil on to the ground/stage and are surprised to be met with hostility and dismissal, for they are looked upon, in Rola's words, as "obscenities" (Dance,p.11), and are not to know that the town dwellers are not expecting them.

Expectations are challenged in this way throughout the play

and one recalls Madmen and Specialists⁹ in which Soyinka similarly fractures the norm in order to make a statement about the aberration that is war - in this case, the Nigerian civil war. At the beginning of Madmen the mendicants play a game of dice in which the stakes are not money but human limbs, and language itself is used in the play to de-familiarize and rupture common associations in a startling way. In the Old Man's "cyst" speech for instance (Madmen, p.275), parts of words such as "mock" in democracy, "mar" in marxism, "ham" in Mohammed are selectively emphasized to subvert and therefore question, at times in clever puns, the significations of these words in an environment which has rendered them meaningless and chaotic.

While language is used disruptively to interrogate the Nigerian socio-political fabric in Madmen, as already noted, Soyinka introduces the human, divine and spirit characters in A Dance in a similarly disjointed, open-ended way to dislocate the audience. One is never sure in the first scene who Obaneji really is, and it is only when Rola makes him uneasy by scoffing "I suppose you have no ancestors" (Dance, p.24), or Ogun declares "I am no less a son to you than others" (Dance, p.28), or when Obaneji himself repeatedly pre-empts the thoughts and actions of the other characters do we realize that he is Forest Head/Olodumare, the supreme deity in the Yoruba pantheon. The aim of such dramatic dislocation is clear. Soyinka was concerned with jolting

⁹ Wole Soyinka, Madmen and Specialists in Collected Plays 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). pp.215-76.

his audiences from complacency and forcing them to confront the unexpected - in this case not a romanticized summation of their cultural heritage as one might expect at a time of celebration, but a disturbing spectacle of their past history.

The Mata Kharibu court scene which is part of the exposition rite Forest Head has arranged, is particularly important in this respect. It not only clarifies for us the true significance of the Dead Couple and the Half-Child, and therefore the nature of Demoke's sacrifice which is to follow, but also what Soyinka was drawing attention to in the play.

The history depicted by Soyinka in this court scene is a distinctly unpleasant one. It is a past in which all the characters, even the Warrior, for he too was once part of a destroying army, are guilty of transgressing decency. Mata Kharibu is no noble leader but a thieving chieftain who plunders the property of others in order to accumulate wealth and power. He steals Madame Tortoise from another chieftain but dissatisfied with that, prepares to wage war to recover her trousseau, claiming that a dignified man does not take a wife without a dowry. He has scant regard for the welfare of his subjects. Despite the warnings of his soothsayer who indicates that neither logistics nor divine favour are on his side - "I see much blood Mata Kharibu. On both sides of the plough" the latter declares - he is determined to wage war, replying "I will be satisfied with that. Does it not mean a great battle?" (Dance, p.52) He

glorifies war as the definitive means of obtaining what he wants, whatever the cost, and it is an attitude that makes him despise the Warrior who has, this time round, refused to fight the senseless war. Having utter contempt for individual freedom (Mata Kharibu refers to the Warrior as "my slave, my subject, my mere human property" (Dance, p.53)), he has no time for dissenting views, and refuses to listen to those who plead for humanity and therefore the arrest of violence and bloodshed. He prefers instead to surround himself with minions like the court historian, yes-men who approve of his whims in order to maintain their own privileges. In such an establishment people with conscience and foresight like the Warrior have no place and become victims of the tyrant's ruthlessness. For incensed at what he perceives as the Warrior's disloyalty, cowardice and "unmanliness" in refusing to fight, Mata Kharibu decides to sell not only the Warrior but also the sixty soldiers the latter commands, down the river as slaves.

While Soyinka, following Yoruba mythic dictates, would not hesitate to support war and violence if they are necessary prerequisites for a restoration of harmony and justice, (his endorsement in Ogun Abibimã of Samora Machel's declaration of war against Ian Smith a case in point), he makes it quite clear that the violence and destruction wrought by Mata Kharibu for greed in A Dance have no justification whatever. At a time of political enfranchisement, Mata Kharibu would stand then as a stark and poignant reminder of those African chiefs who waged

petty internecine regional and tribal wars which jeopardized their defences and opened the doors to years of colonization from which the region was just emerging.¹⁰ But even more importantly, Soyinka was also showing that tyrants like Mata Kharibu are not aberrations of the past, inhabiting history books alone, but precursors of the Dictators, Army Generals and politicians at the helm of ruthless and corrupt regimes in many African and post-colonial countries today. Mata Kharibu is to be recognized as a prototype of men who, blind to "spirituality", exult in power as Kongi, Bero and Kamini are shown to do in plays like Kongi's Harvest, Madmen and Specialists and A Play of Giants respectively. For Kongi and his henchmen are only concerned with image-building, asserting that he is, ironically, the true "spirit" of the harvest when in fact he is utterly indifferent to the real harvest and therefore the fundamental well-being of the people; Bero is bent on destroying the traditions and spirituality the earth mothers Iya Agba and Iya Mate epitomize, and Kamini (a caricature of Idi Amin) together with his fellow dictators Kasco (Bokassa) and Gnuema (Nguema) are men whose only joy is in perversely acquiring material wealth and power whatever the cost. When the Spirit of Precious Stones, as a symbol of such wealth, states in A Dance, "Still do I draw them down/ into the pit that glitters, I/ Spirit of gold and diamonds/ Mine is the vain light courting death" (Dance, p.65), it is a statement which implies doom for men like the Kaminis and Kongis of this world,

¹⁰ For a discussion on how the British exploited such rivalries in their scramble for West Africa, see Obaro Ikime, The Fall of Nigeria (London: Heinemann, 1971), Chapter 1.

who are led **down** both literally and metaphorically to the pit that glitters, "vain" signifying both the vanity of their wishes and the falsity of their values. It is a statement which serves to reinforce Soyinka's argument that those who are engrossed in pursuing the material, oblivious to the creative and "spiritual", are, as Yoruba dictates imply, warped and human failures.

Madame Tortoise is, in A Dance, as reprehensible as her husband. A **femme fatale**, she is whimsical, self-indulgent and insensitive to both Mata Kharibu (Soyinka shows her to be quite oblivious to his anger at one point (Dance,p.46)) whom she openly calls a fool, and her people. She is described as "very gay and cruel in her coquetry" (Dance,p.46), and is shown to be a sexual tease who has caused the deaths of many infatuated lovers, the latest being a soldier who fell to his death from a rooftop because in her words, "He was too eager". (Dance,p.47) We see her throughout the scene as such a coquette, teasing the court poet into ordering his novice to climb the dangerous roof in order to retrieve her canary - a bird she capriciously rejects once the boy has gone after it and paid for his endeavour by falling over and breaking his arm. She is shown to be able to command these men - the Warrior describes her as "the woman who now rules all our lives - even Mata Kharibu" (Dance,p.49) - because of her sexual power and cruelty to those refusing to humour her whims.

We see an example of this cruelty when, playing the seductive temptress with the Warrior, Madame Tortoise indicates

admiration for his "manliness" in refusing to fight Mata Kharibu's war, and suggests that if he becomes her lover he could not only save his life but succeed Mata Kharibu's throne as well. Enraged at being rejected by him however, she shows her true colours, revealing that she is as proud and ruthless as her husband. She orders the Warrior to be castrated before being sold into slavery, choosing to destroy the very manhood she desired and which spurned her. Her cruelty is underlined in the play when the Warrior's pregnant wife, (the dead woman of the present), her pregnancy an obvious symbol of this manhood which is about to be destroyed, pleads in vain for mercy. Madame Tortoise's wounded pride makes her fiendishly resolute and the scene ends with the woman clutching her womb as she collapses, emphasizing both her vulnerability as a future mother without a husband (we later learn that she commits suicide), as well as a creativity and fertility Madame Tortoise does not have (the woman later refers to her as one who has no womb (Dance, p.60)) and does her best to destroy.

The court of Mata Kharibu is tainted further by the presence of corrupt officials like the court historian and the slave trader. The latter ushers in a particularly unpleasant strand of African history into the play. The political processes leading to Independence would have necessarily recalled the injustice suffered by the colonized black African, and attention in such evocations would have been for the most part on the intrusive and deplorable role played by the white colonizer and

slave trader. For Soyinka however, the time had come to reflect on the African's own involvement in the trade. The white slave trader could not have run a successful business if not for the complicity of the Africans themselves who bartered their prisoners of war to the Europeans for gold and goods from Europe, and levied taxes on slave convoys as they passed through their territories on the way to the coast etc.¹¹ The presence of the slave trader would serve then to force the audience to confront its own complicity in a harsh history, and question at the very least, tribal structures which continue to institutionally exploit and oppress those of "inferior" birth who were once sold as slaves.

Soyinka's intention in the play was to make this history of corruption and exploitation, mediated through the characters at Mata Kharibu's court, more immediate and therefore of vital relevance to the contemporary audience. He was concerned with showing that such depravity was not just a feature of the past but something which continues to distort the present as well, and that histories of corruption and greed evolve in endless cyclical patterns perpetuated through successive generations. Soyinka's strategy then is to give dual existences (an ancestral and a present) to some of his characters which, within the Yoruba context of A Dance, has added significance. For in Yoruba belief the dead, the living and the unborn coexist, reinforcing the fact

¹¹ See Obaro Ikime, The Fall of Nigeria, Chapter 1, and F.R. Augier et al, The Making of the West Indies (Port of Spain & Kingston: Longman Caribbean, 1984), Part 1, Chapter 7.

that "Traditional thought operates, not a linear conception of time but a cyclical reality."¹²

Thus Rola is in the present, the same siren she was in the past as Madame Tortoise, and it is apt that her initial reaction to the dead Warrior should reflect her sexual interest in him, for she is the one who first brings to our notice the fact that he is an eunuch. (Dance, p.8) It must be marked here that while the characters at Mata Kharibu's court are, for Soyinka's dramatic purposes, necessarily archetypal, in the portraits of Madame Tortoise and Rola, Soyinka conforms to stereotypes which are sexist and simplistic. It is the sexuality of the women which is emphasized throughout the play, as it is with Sigi in Kongi's Harvest, Simi in The Interpreters and the more passive Iriyesi in Season of Anomy who is, for Ofeyi, "Caryatid and timeless", one who never worries but merely submits soul and body to his fantasies. (Season, p.40) Demoke's acknowledgement in A Dance that Madame Tortoise has been inspirational in the sculpture he has created in honour of the Gathering of the Tribes reflects again, such an idealizing of female sexuality. These women are denied a language other than their sexuality, and they are shown to use their sexuality exclusively to dominate men. What Soyinka does not realize however, is that seduction is the resort of a powerless woman in the first place. It is a helplessness ironically underscored in A Dance in the fact that the

¹² Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.10.

emphasis/sympathy is much more on the enormity of the Warrior's castration.

The court historian of the past, Adenebi, is the council orator of the present, and corrupt in both existences. In the past he was involved in the slave trade, and had issued a licence to a boat in which the slaves undergo, according to the court physician, "twenty torments of hell" during their journey down the river. (Dance, p.52) In the present he is shown to be similarly corrupt, having issued for a bribe, a licence permitting the transportation of seventy passengers to a lorry designed to carry only forty. The deed has dire consequences for the lorry overturns, and catching fire, claims the lives of sixty five of its passengers who burn to death.

Such an accident, involving mostly school children on their way to the Nigerian capital did in fact take place at the time of the Independence celebrations.¹³ This incident can be taken as a key to understanding the political agenda of A Dance. The contemporary reference to recent tragedy, and the deliberate and repeated allusion to its cause as bribery and corruption, must have a strong impact on the audience in a mood of celebration. The fact that this incident is given such importance - it reverberates through the play in the form of the other infamous lorry, the Chimney of Ereko, - strikes a discordant note and would force the audience to conceive of the play as a political

¹³ Oyin Ogunba, The Movement of Transition, p.83.

allegory.

The Gathering of the Tribes signifies a coming together of various tribes - an occurrence which happens perhaps once in Centuries - and what A Dance shows admirably is how people use the occasion to jockey for power in a manner which reflects neo-colonial machinations today. The Dead Couple look for justice and a redress of past wrongs inflicted on them by the "living". The "living" try their utmost to get rid of the Dead Couple - the Old Man who is Demoke's father, actually arranging for a smoking lorry (the Chimney of Ereko - its name aptly summing up the state of its exhaust), to smoke them out in what becomes a comic and bizarre theatrical moment in the play. Adenebi makes money out of the occasion as he continues to exploit what comes his way for material gain. Even the gods Ogun and Eshuoro constantly contest each other for power and influence over Demoke, so much so that at one point Forest Head has to physically restrain them. Holding them apart he complains, "Soon, I will not tell you from the humans, so closely have their habits grown on you", and asks, "Did I summon this welcoming for your prowess or for ends of my own?" (Dance, p.59) For Demoke, being an artist, is Ogun's protege, and the god is shown throughout to be protective of him, particularly as Eshuoro seeks revenge, wanting to punish Demoke for having cut the araba tree sacred to him. This battle between the gods will take on added significance, as will be shown, when they fight for possession of the Half-Child later in the play.

Given such a scenario, there are, inevitably, the victims of those who have succeeded to positions of power. A particularly violent power relationship is played out between the gods and Murete in A Dance. Murete is a tree imp who lives in the forest, and is terrorized by Aroni, Ogun and Eshuoro as they use him to gather information about what goes on in the forest, without bothering to reward him for his services, or allow him his personal freedom - Aroni for instance is annoyed that Murete wants to attend the feast of the living instead of the Welcoming of the Dead that he and Forest Head have arranged. (Dance, pp.12-3) Prospero-like, he threatens Murete - "One more impertinence out of you and I'll tie you backwards and leave you with your tongue licking the earthworm's discharge at every fall of a leaf." (Dance, p.13) In this respect, the "living" treat Murete with far more respect, for Agboreko brings him millet wine, and when the Old Man looks to Murete to supply intelligence, he is willing to offer the imp a bribe of an years supply of millet wine! (Dance, p.33)

The exploited humans in society are represented through the ants in the play. Soyinka's choice of symbol is apt. Ants are often trod on by humans as the ant leader reminds us (Dance, p.67), and their connection with the earth - "We take our colour from the fertile loam/ Our numbers from the hair-roots of the earth/...We are the children of the earth" states the ant leader (Dance, p .67) - evokes associations of the peasant who works closely with the land. Moreover, in popular Yoruba belief, ants

are beneficial insects who have life-giving and healing properties.¹⁴ The toiling masses are certainly beneficial and life-enabling, but the irony is that they benefit everyone else but themselves. For the ants testify to a life of hard labour and harsh political reality. They are "the ones remembered/ When nations build" (Dance, p.68), for it is the workers' labour which is relied on by newly independent countries for their development projects, and multinational corporations grow rich on as they provide a source of cheap labour. Soyinka insists here that nothing be taken for granted.¹⁵

Peter Nazareth accused Soyinka of presenting in A Dance, a de-politicized work, warning against man's inhumanity to man with a moral consciousness rather than a political one. The critic stated, "It was a warning Soyinka was making with a **moral** consciousness, not a **political** consciousness. In this play he was showing what could go wrong because of the failure and weaknesses of human nature, not because of the political forces at work. Thus there is no mention in the play of imperialism" and asked, "Did Soyinka believe that the British were handing the Nigerians

¹⁴ Michel Fabre, "Soyinka's Use of Yoruba Mythology in A Dance of the Forests," Commonwealth Special Issue, no.1, 1989. p.28.

¹⁵ A Dance was culled from an anti-apartheid play Soyinka had written earlier entitled "The Dance of the African Forest" (see James Gibbs, Wole Soyinka, p.63), and the political dispossession of black South Africans would also have undoubtedly impinged on the playwright's mind when portraying such oppression.

a clean sheet?"¹⁶ Nazareth's criticism reflects however, a scant reading of the text. For the forces of imperialism **are** present in A Dance, not as scenes of conquest, imposition and national resistance as a character like Adenebi might have expected, but more rigorously as economic imperialism which obliterates the political freedoms gained by poor post-colonial countries today. The ant leader is aware of this reality, for replying Forest Head who asks whether the ants are not free, he states,

"Freedom we have
Like the hunter on a precipice
...
Freedom indeed we have
To choose our path
To turn to the left or the right
Like the spider in the sand-pit
And the great ball of eggs
Pressing on his back.

(Dance, p.67-8)

The lines are loaded ones, expressing awareness of economic realities binding poor over-populated countries (the eggs symbolic of both unborn generations and the burden of labour), to rich industrialized ones on either side of the political spectrum who dictate their paths through economic aid and military alliances.

By giving the exploited in society a voice in such a manner, by including moreover the triplets, the spirits of Precious Stones, Pachyderms, Darkness etc. as further forces of oppression and social degeneration, Soyinka grounds A Dance in political reality. The characters and hierarchies within the play have

¹⁶ Peter Nazareth, Literature and Society in Modern Africa, p.66.

their parallels in the socio-political structures governing contemporary society. Forest Head and Aroni for instance are very much part of an elite establishment, for they don't even recognize the ants (Forest Head repeatedly asks for identification from the ant leader (Dance,p.68)), and are unsympathetic to their cause, while the monstrous triplets, with names like "The Ends that Justify the Means", "The Greater Cause", and "Prosperity" serve as sardonic caricatures of corrupt neo-colonials operating in society today. It is surely futile then to attempt to distinguish, as Nazareth does, between moral and political consciousness. The two go together, which is why Forest Head describes the triplets as "perversions (that) are born when (men) acquire power over one another, and their instincts are fulfilled a thousandfold, a hundred thousandfold" (Dance,p.69), in a statement which would have fearful resonance for the newly created post-colonial world in which many of its politicians would betray the trust of their people.

It is in Yoruba folklore and religious ritual that Soyinka sees dictates pertinent to the societal regeneration required to combat the evils besetting contemporary society. The play is imbued therefore with theatrical metaphors anchored in this ritual and folklore. The forest itself is an important symbol in the play. Traditionally the forest has been considered a mysterious domain in which people confront great dangers, encounter spirits and deities, and emerge from, with greater awareness of themselves and their environment. Both D.O.Fagunwa

and Amos Tutuola use the forest as such an arena in The Forest of A Thousand Daemons and The Palm Wine Drinkard respectively, for it is where Akara Ogun and the palm wine drinkard face grave dangers and do well to survive with the aid of various spirits and household deities. It is entirely in keeping with tradition therefore that in A Dance, it is in the forest that Forest Head (his name indicative of his power over this important terrain and the life within it) and his aide Aroni arrange for the exposition rite to take place. The forest is shown to parallel the ritual arena of transition in which Demoke, Rola and the Old Man become ritual participants, encountering a spirituality and tradition ignored in the world outside. Adenebi for instance is not even allowed into the forest by Forest Head, for like Noah in The Interpreters who runs away from the initiation Lazarus has arranged for him, Adenebi is insensitive to the means of his regeneration.

It is also significant that it is in a grove in the forest that Demoke, always sensitive to tradition, erects the totem he has carved in honour of the Gathering of the Tribes. When the town-dwellers denude the grove, exposing the sculpture, Demoke runs away from it, for he feels that his creation loses integrity without the spiritual surroundings of the forest which give it strength. He also dreads its exposure to "philistines" like Adenebi who, ignorant of tradition, criticize the sculpture for being "pagan". The forest functions then as a metaphor which emphasizes the theme of spirituality versus the material which



runs through the play.

The Old Man's strategy of getting The Chimney of Ereko to drive out the unwelcome Dead Couple is also rooted in folklore, for it brings to mind an ancient ruse used to get rid of unwanted spirits. Yoruba folklore has it that ghommids and other forest creatures dislike smoke and unpleasant smells. Fagunwa's hero Akara Ogun pulls vigorously at his pipe in The Forest of A Thousand Daemons for instance to smoke out a walnut troll who has disturbed his peace.¹⁷ The smoking exhaust of the Chimney of Ereko is meant to similarly drive out the forest spirits and we see its efficacy in this respect when the forest creatures run away from it holding their noses in disgust at the petrol fumes. (Dance, p.39)

Such elements of folklore and symbols are coupled in the play with the dances of the dirge man and his female acolyte, choric exchanges, the inquisition of the dead, the proclamation of the Forest Crier and the festival dances, all of which have their roots in, or are directly taken from Yoruba ritual. Oyin Ogunba found the pageantry over-emphasized and complained, "The dances are...too many and Soyinka over-tasks his audience piling dance over dance, all within a very short time."¹⁸ While this may be true, what they reinforce, by functioning as theatrical

¹⁷ D.O.Fagunwa, A Forest of A Thousand Daemons trns. Wole Soyinka, (Hong Kong: Thomas Nelson, 1982), p.17.

¹⁸ Oyin Ogunba, The Movement of Transition, p.97.

metaphors, is the validity of Yoruba myth and ritual for contemporary reality, and it is a correlative Soyinka emphasizes through the important rite, in which Demoke the artist, enacts the role of an Ogun-like protagonist in the play.

It is primarily through the figure of Demoke that Soyinka narrativizes the validity of Yoruba **mythic** history for contemporary experience in the play. In his preface, Aroni describes Demoke's involvement in the preparations for the Gathering of the Tribes. As an artist, Demoke was commissioned by the elders of the Council to create a symbolic work of art in honour of the celebrations. To this end he chose an araba, or silk-cotton tree, sacred to the god Eshuoro as a medium to work on, and inspired by Ogun, patron god of artisans and craftsmen, proceeded to carve it with the help of his acolyte Oremole, disciple of Eshuoro. Demoke however committed two fundamental errors during the course of his work. Because of his fear of heights and therefore inability to climb to its top, Demoke had the araba shortened in order to carve it more masterfully - an action which enraged Eshuoro who took offence at the desecration of his sacred tree. Secondly, Demoke plucked down Oremole, the braver apprentice who worked above him on the sculpture, off the tree in a fit of hubristic jealousy, causing the latter to fall to his death.

Demoke's role in the carving of Eshuoro's tree and the murder of Oremole has its parallels in the "hubristic

assertiveness" of Ogun who combated the chthonic realm only to violate the harmony in "nature" by slaughtering his people at Ire. For just as Ogun bridged the gap between the gods and wo/men, fired by creative individualism, Demoke too set out to carve a splendid sculpture indicative of the best creativity of man. But just as an integral part of Ogun's nature led him to slaughter his own men at Ire, so did Demoke's jealousy of Oremole and desire to assert supremacy over his acolyte, his artistic material and overcome his weakness of vertigo, cause him to murder the apprentice.

Demoke yearns above all to conquer his fear of heights, for he is thwarted by his inability to master his material - he states, "where my hands are burning to work, where my hands are trembling to mould, my body will not take me" and asks "Is that not a lack of fulfilment?" (Dance, p.20). He is also irked by Oremole whose jibe - "Let me anoint/ The head, and do you, my master, trim the bulge/ Of his great bottom" (Dance, p.27) - wounds his pride. In his determination to overcome his weakness is a heroism worthy of the challenging spirit of Ogun. For there is a Promethean instinct in Demoke which drives him to grapple with his weakness head-on. This is evident when Obaneji asks him how he would like to die, and Demoke replies that he would like to die falling from a great height. (Dance, p.19) We realize that this is not simply to expiate his guilt over Oremole's death, but to experience once and for all, the sense of fulfilment in having overcome his weakness even if it means death. Demoke possesses

then, the "knowledge-seeking instinct" Soyinka identified Ogun as having, which set the god apart as "the only deity who 'sought the way'...through the primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man."¹⁹ To fall from a great height would be, for Demoke, to know conclusively what it is to attain such altitudes.

Demoke's murder of Oremole also illustrates the important destructive/creative dictate at the core of the Ogun myth. Demoke describes,

Alone I cut the strands that mocked me, till head
And boastful slave lay side by side, and I
Demoke, sat in the shoulders of the tree,
My spirit set free and singing, my hands,
My father's hands possessed by demons of blood
And I carved three days and nights...

(Dance, p.27)

His "father's hands" signify both the bloodied hands of his patron god Ogun after Ire, as well as the creativity of generations which flows through Demoke once he kills Oremole. His spirit is "set free and singing" by this act, and it is a freedom which leads him to a frenzied spell of creativity which enables him to finish the sculpture in three days. A destructive act such as the murder of Oremole is shown then to be a **precondition** for such creativity.

As the Ogun myth tells us, there is a penalty for violating "nature" however. A balance in harmony that has been breached by such a murder demands a sacrifice for its appeasement. It is in

¹⁹ Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World, p.27.

this respect that the scene with the Half-Child attains great significance in the play. It is a scene many critics have found confusing. Gerald Moore for instance stated, "Soyinka has fallen into the error of offering us, in these final scenes, a text which is too thin and unexplicit to guide us through a complex maze of stage action performed to music alone" and added that "the devices he adopts for showing the complementary interaction of present and future are likely to fail dramatically through sheer obscurity".²⁰ It is my contention, however, that the scene makes sense if the emphasis is shifted somewhat from the Half-Child (the figure most critics have focused on - Margaret Laurence representative of them when she states "Basically, however, it is the Half-Child who will soon be the central figure in this scene"²¹), to Demoke as a tragic protagonist, performing a ritual sacrifice for the restoration of the harmony in "nature" he has violated.

This is not to say the Half-Child is unimportant. For if we are to understand the nature of Demoke's sacrifice it is vital to ascertain what the Half-Child is symbolic of. The many debates on the play have been precisely over this issue. Given the occasion on which the play was staged, the Half-Child has been seen as a symbol of the future and a newly gained freedom. That it is a **half**-child is significant, for the concept of something not quite fully formed or gained has been often associated with

²⁰ Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka, p.40.

²¹ Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons, p.40.

newly obtained post-coloniality. The titles of Chinua Achebe's "Morning **Yet** on Creation Day", and Armah's "The Beautiful Ones Are Not **Yet** Born" (my emphases) express awareness, as Soyinka's works do, of the burgeoning gap between the ideals looked to at a time of political independence, and post-colonial reality in which these aspirations remain as yet unfulfilled. The figure of the Bolom in Walcott's Ti-Jean and His Brothers (1958), strangled at birth yet eager for a new life, is again symbolic of Caribbean aspirations for political freedom which, at the time the play was written had yet to be realized. Discussing A Dance Una Maclean stated then that, "At the very end of the play (Demoke) is seen protecting the newly-born child of the warrior. But this hope of the future is still only a "half-child" waiting to be given full and assured existence."²²

Eldred Durosimi Jones finds however that "the suggestion that the Half-Child is a symbol of man's future begins to look weak" when Demoke hands over the Half-Child to the dead woman who presumably returns with it to the world of the dead, thus depriving it of life.²³ Nick Wilkinson has similar doubts and states that "With the Ants and the Triplets revealing the future for human beings, treating the Half-Child as a symbol of the future seems superfluous" and suggests that it symbolizes rather the **abiku** figure - the child who in African belief, comes back

²² Una Maclean, "Soyinka's International Drama," p.49.

²³ Eldred Durosimi Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka, pp.46-7.

repeatedly to the same mother to be born dead.²⁴

The danger here is that first, these critics **pre-suppose** that any future referred to in the context of independence from imperialism must be essentially optimistic, and second, they categorize the Half-Child as symbolic of only one thing. It has already been noted that the bizarre and disruptive theatricality of the play, as well as the dual existence of the characters is there to jolt audience complacency, and that the play's argument is that the depravity witnessed in Mata Kharibu's court continues to inhabit the present, giving ample warning that it is too early for uncritical optimism. Moreover, the multiplicity of themes operating in the play demands that symbols such as the Half-Child take on multifarious and not exclusive meaning. Thus the Half-Child is, considering that Nigerian independence was in its infancy, a not fully developed potential for freedom, "waiting" in Maclean's words "to be given full and assured existence." It is at the same time an **abiku** figure, a doomed thing, for the **abiku** child is a phenomenon symbolizing a hopeless pattern of perpetual repetition (in Soyinka's poem Abiku the child states "I am Abiku, calling for the first/ And the repeated time"²⁵), which is why the Half-Child cries foreseeing doom, "I who yet wait a mother/ Feel this dread,/ Feel this dread,/ I who flee from womb/ To branded womb, cry it now/ I'll be born dead/ I'll

²⁴ Nick Wilkinson, "Demoke's Choice in Soyinka's A Dance of the Forests," p.24.

²⁵ Wole Soyinka, "Abiku" in Idanre and Other Poems (London: Methuen, 1967), p.28.

be born dead". (Dance, p.64) In this context then, the Half-Child would function to reiterate one of the key themes of the play which is that doom and suffering engulf wo/man in repetitive cycles, escape from which is not within the grasp of the purely material world that people like Mata Kharibu and Adenebi inhabit.

In an extremely dramatic scene in which tension is heightened by the play of drums, masks, a game of "ampe" which increases in tempo and therefore suspense, and an acrobatic dance involving knives which enhances the danger, the Half-Child is tossed to and fro between Eshuoro, his jester and the triplets, each representing the negative characteristics of selfishness and revenge in wo/man. Eshuoro is in fact a fusion of the worst elements, for Soyinka has created him by fusing Eshu, Yoruba god of fate associated with evil and malice, with Oro, a Yoruba cult which stands for the punitive principle or revenge. It is this instinct for revenge which manifests itself when, enraged at Demoke's desecration of his tree, Eshuoro vows to seek vengeance, warning of the evil that would befall the artist (Dance, pp.43-4), and in sheer spite damages Murete's tree to avenge his loss of pride. As Brian Crow, Oga Abagh and Saddik Tafawa Balewa state in their joint article entitled "Soyinka and the Voice of Vision", "As the embodiment of a permanent tendency in nature, including human nature, (Eshuoro) represents the vengeful, remorseless violence which in its human historical aspect is exhibited in man's inhumanity to man in the scene at

Mata Kharibu's court."²⁶ Eshuoro and his aides represent a corrosive evil then which is directly opposed to the creativity of Ogun.

As Robert Fraser has indicated, there are four extant versions of the ending of the play²⁷, and we see from the two published versions (one of which was used for the 1960 production), that they differ subtly from each other, and point in important ways to how Soyinka validates his Yoruba religion and mythology for contemporary experience in the play.

The Interpreter is standing near Demoke, and suddenly he pulls the Interpreter aside, catches the "ibeji". Eshuoro moves at once to the Half-Child but he runs to Demoke and clings to him...The Dead Woman appeals, mutely to Demoke. All eyes are intent on Demoke until he makes up his mind. Restores the "ibeji" to the Half-Child...As the Jesters stamp towards the Half-Child again, Demoke picks him up and seats him on one shoulder, tries to move towards the Dead Woman standing with eager arms outstretched. They manoeuvre Demoke away at every attempt he makes...Demoke gets wearier and wearier, begins to sag...Demoke sags to his knees, the Dead Woman runs to him, snatches the falling Half-Child and is swallowed by the forest. Demoke collapses on the ground.

(1960 Production. Dance, pp.75-6.)

The Half-Child is now tossed back to Eshuoro, and suddenly Demoke dashes forward to intercept. Eshuoro laughs, pretends to throw the child back, Demoke dashes off only to find that he still retains the child...They keep up this game for a brief period, with Demoke running between them, until Ogun appears behind the Interpreter, pulls

²⁶ Brian Crow, Oga.S.Abagh and Saddik Tafawa Balewa, "Soyinka and the Voice of Vision," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 17, no.1, 1982. p.117.

²⁷ See Robert Fraser, "Four Alternative Endings," pp.359-74.

him aside just as the child is thrown towards him, makes the catch himself passing it instantly to Demoke, who stands confused, not knowing what the next step should be. He decides eventually to restore the child to the Dead Woman...The Woman appeals, mutely to Demoke. All eyes are intent upon Demoke until he makes up his mind; gives the child to the Dead Woman...Eshuoro gives a loud yell of triumph, rushes offstage, accompanied by the Jester. The triplets follow gleefully.

(Published Version. Dance, 71-2.)

In the (original) performed version, we see that the Half-Child is not tossed between Eshuoro, the triplets and jester, but a more practical **ibeji**, an African figure symbolic of twins and worn on the wrist of twins is.²⁸ In both versions, the moral decision as to the fate of the Half-Child lies with Demoke, and it is this decision which constitutes his greatest challenge in the play. If Demoke decides to return the Half-Child, the **abiku** figure, to its mother, he risks perpetuating a horrific pattern of rapaciousness and destruction. On the other hand, Forest Head and Aroni make it quite clear that the pattern must remain unchanged, for "nothing is ever altered" and, as Aroni warns, "It is no light matter to reverse the deed that was begun many lives ago. The Forest will not let you pass." (Dance, p.71)

²⁸ Not only is the **ibeji** a practical alternative to throwing a child around on stage, but also an image which enhances the sense of doom the Half-Child symbolizes. For the birth of twins was regarded as abnormal and tragic in poor pre-colonial African societies, and consequently, one of the twins would be killed. Western education and Christianity intervened in such practices, but according to J.Omosade Awolalu, the average Yoruba finds it difficult even now not to regard such births as tragic. See J.Omosade Awolalu, Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites (London: Longmann, 1979), p.192.

It becomes apparent that Demoke is denied victory **either** way, which is why Eshuoro yells in delight and the triplets celebrate gleefully when he hands over the Half-Child to the Dead Woman. This is the price Demoke has to pay for having ruptured the harmony in nature. This loss to Eshuoro echoes a similar domination by the Devil in Walcott's Ti-Jean and His Brothers, in which, despite Ti-Jean's victory in having successfully made the devil weep, the latter declares, "I never keep bargains" and warns, "We shall meet again, Ti-Jean. You, and your new brother!/ The features will change, but the fight is still on."²⁹ In this respect both plays express pessimistic visions in which evil continues to flourish wherever and whenever it can, overpowering what is good and wholesome in life.

The published but unperformed version is however far more optimistic in tone, and we see that Ogun plays a fundamental role in contributing to the sense of resolution with which the play ends. It is Ogun who sustains Demoke throughout the play. He restores health and energy to his protege exhausted after three days of continuous carving, and takes on responsibility for his crime, declaring to Eshuoro, "In all that he did, he followed my bidding". (Dance, p.58) In this version, we see Ogun actively interceding to catch the Half-Child, and when Demoke falls off the totem to which Eshuoro has set fire, Ogun is there to catch him before he falls to his death. It is significant

²⁹ Derek Walcott, Ti-Jean and His Brothers in Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p.164.

however that at the moment when Demoke **most** needs help, having to decide the fate of the Half-Child, Ogun does not intervene. Neither does Forest Head, for although he is weary of the brutality of human beings, he is unable to contradict the cyclical pattern of destruction, as "there is no choice but one of suffering." (Dance,p.61) It is an incapacity for effective intervention which underscores the weaknesses and the "innate humanity" Yoruba gods themselves inhabit.

Demoke's isolation when having to decide what to do with the Half-Child without the help of a **deus ex machina** is evidence of Soyinka's refusal to simplify. It is a statement on the complexity of moral choice, all such decisions having fearful implications and involving personal sacrifice which must however be endured if society is to be just and free. In the published but unperformed version of the ending, after much tense deliberation, for all eyes are on him at this point, Demoke hands the Half-Child to its mother. It is a humane choice to make, but one which has dire implications for it signals the continuity of **abiku** and a cycle of carnage.

In the performed version however these implications are effaced, as Soyinka has the dead woman **snatch** the Half-Child from an exhausted Demoke, thus removing the moral responsibility of such a decision from him. This version too reiterates nevertheless that the pattern of exploitation and destruction continues.

Demoke's penance does not end with the decision over the Half-Child's fate however. In the unperformed version he has to fulfil yet another part of the ordeal demanded of him for the restitution of nature. He is forced by a victorious Eshuoro to climb the totem he has carved, despite his fear of heights. The moment is a dramatic one which evokes multiple associations, for fear of, and scaling dangerous heights are common in mythology and one recalls the exploits of Icarus, Phaeton, and Prometheus among others, not to mention the resonance at this point of Madame Tortoise's command to the hapless court poet to scale the roof in search of her canary earlier in the play.

This version, as has been noted, is optimistic, for Demoke successfully climbs the totem despite his fear of heights (it is called the Dance of the Unwilling Sacrifice), and even when Eshuoro sets fire to it in a bid to reassert his supremacy, Ogun is there to save his protege as the latter falls. Demoke is reunited with his father and the aim of the gods in the play is met when Demoke, having given of himself totally - he asks his father "have we not done enough? Have we not felt enough for the memory of our remaining lives?" (Dance, p.73) - realizes that such a giving/ sacrifice has been necessary for the benefit of both himself as an individual and the community. Rola emerges from the experience "chastened", her identity changed, for Demoke no longer recognizes her as Madame Tortoise (Dance, p.74), and the Old Man declares, "Fools we were to pit our weakness against the

cunning of Aroni, chasing souls whom he has resolved to welcome." (Dance, p.73) It is wisdom the living characters have learnt at a price but which will strengthen them in facing the future.

It is a resolution enabled by Ogun's active agency in the action. Where the god does not intervene, as in the performed version, all is negated and lost. Demoke sinks to the ground, exhausted by the weight of the Half-Child on his shoulder, symbolizing the burden of both past and future. The final image we have of him is not of a restored human being who has acquired greater knowledge of himself and his surroundings as in the unperformed version, but a defeated man who has collapsed under the strain of all that is negating in the play. In having to appease nature for his crime, Demoke has had to pay a sacrifice of tragic dimensions.

The difference in the endings points to Soyinka's belief that in the Ogun myth (and therefore indigenous values), are dictates pertinent to contemporary societal regeneration. With the help of the god and all he stands for, contemporary Yorubans can forge a better society. The need for such a change is irrefutable, given the political allegory of the play which depicted a corrupt and pernicious society. Contained in A Dance then, is a political reality which is shown to be best dealt with through indigenous, Yoruba principles. Exactly how one does this is never explained. What has to be noted however is that on the

brink of a new phase of Nigerian history, Soyinka was arguing for a "return to the source" which would enable his countrymen/women to find in their **own** indigenous epistememes, principles with which to confront and combat contemporary reality.

The whole of A Dance is a rite then which Forest Head has arranged to "pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness." (Dance, p.71) We, as the audience, participate with the protagonists in this exposition rite so that in Aroni's words, we may "discover the means of (our) own regeneration." (Dance, p.59) But apart from the intrinsic ritualistic content of the play, the structure of A Dance also parallels a ritual, for in beginning with Aroni's description of Demoke's murder of Oremole, and ending with the scene of the Half-Child in which Demoke pays the sacrifice for that murder/violation of nature, the play enacts a cycle dramatized in ritual. Within the meaning of A Dance this fact also has deeper resonance in that being a complete cycle, the structure of the play itself reflects an important message contained within it which is that history evolves in a similar cyclical pattern.

That Demoke is, in A Dance, an artist both in the past as court poet and in the present as a sculptor is significant, for it is through him that Soyinka explores the role of the artist/intellectual in society. The figure is realistically shown by the playwright to be privileged. The court poet has a rapport with

Madame Tortoise and a degree of freedom others at the court do not enjoy. Demoke's sculpture is admired by many including Forest Head. But contrary to Ngugi's contention that "The artist in Soyinka's world comes off unscathed"³⁰ in that he is never the butt of Soyinka's satire, the court poet in A Dance, although not satirized, is shown to inhabit an ambiguous, even untenable position. For although critical of the injustice and arbitrariness of the regime of Mata Kharibu, the poet confines his opposition to asides, hints and thoughts while doing the bidding of his pay-master/mistress. In this he stands in stark contrast to the Warrior, whose stand against Mata Kharibu is a self-conscious, sustained and principled one for which he suffers greatly, losing his "manhood" and wife, doomed to remain lonely and unaccepted even after death. The court poet's existence and complicity in the events that take place in the court is thrown into question by the Warrior then, for as Soyinka stated elsewhere, "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny."³¹

Such an evasion of responsibility cannot continue forever however, and when in his present existence Demoke sets about fulfilling his social obligations vis-a-vis the Half-Child, at terrific cost to himself, it is as if he has learnt from the

³⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Satire in Nigeria," Protest and Conflict in African Literature ed. Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro (London: Heinemann, 1982), p.68.

³¹ Wole Soyinka, The Man Died (London: Rex Collings, 1985), p.13.

Warrior's defiance and initiative, and the failings of his ancestral self. The persona of the artist Soyinka creates then is a figure who, inspired by tradition and driven by an Ogun-like temperament, creatively asserts himself for the benefit of the community. The artist's mission in life dictates that he be held within a destructive/creative tension which necessitates great sacrifice which could even be of tragic dimensions. But paying this is a duty he has to fulfil as a moral protector of society, more so because the sacrifice itself is shown to have been compensated for in his lifetime with privilege and public accolade. It must be noted however that Soyinka is never reductive about the trauma of the sacrifice itself, and he would eloquently dramatize the difficulties attending it in The Strong Breed and Death and the King's Horseman which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Many critics have found A Dance confusing for what they see as its overloaded language and excessive symbolism. Ketu Katrak stated "In A Dance of the Forests, the overabundant use of mime and masquerade, coupled with overly symbolic language, results in obfuscation of the meaning of the text."³² Margaret Laurence complained "The action is rapid - sometimes too rapid...the idiom is frequently unfamiliar; the poetic imagery is sometimes bewildering"³³, while James Gibbs called the play an "unsuccessful early work out of which several successes can

³² Ketu Katrak, Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy, p.141.

³³ Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons, p.29.

be carved."³⁴ It has to be granted that unlike The Interpreters which, being a novel, allows the reader to conveniently re-read and clarify what is bewildering and obscure, as a play meant for performance, A Dance is certainly overwritten, containing as it does multiple themes such as the cyclical nature of history, wo/man's alienation from spirituality and tradition, the innate humanity of the gods, the role of the artist/tragic protagonist in society, the validity of Yoruba mythic history for the present etc.³⁵ Moreover, because of the multiplicity and density of its themes, A Dance is a work which could be in danger of being theatrically successful on the sheer force of its spectacle alone.

This would indeed be unfortunate. For A Dance is much more than spectacle. It is a work in which Soyinka insists on an honest evaluation of Nigerian history, his task all the more creditable and important for coming at a time of national celebration. In doing so he was challenging the "romanticized rhetoric" of a writer like Senghor who, a generation earlier, had projected images of a noble and idyllic pre-colonial Africa. Senghor had ridiculed the European in Chaka, but had failed to look inward and be self-critical. It is symptomatic then, that there is no mention in his poem of the African's own complicity

³⁴ James Gibbs, Wole Soyinka, p.70.

³⁵ A Dance has not been regularly performed, and it is likely that its complexity as well as elaborate stage devices such as the smoking lorry, together with the many props, dances and choric participants needed for the production would deter many from attempting it.

in the slave trade.

I did not hate the Pink Ears. We welcomed them as
 messengers of the gods
 With pleasant words and delicious drinks.
 They wanted merchandise. We gave them everything:
 ivory,
 honey, rainbow pelts
 Spices and gold, precious stones, parrots and
 monkeys.³⁶

For Soyinka, such a history is not only inaccurate but alien to the precepts of the "African" world-view as well. He commented in "And After the Narcissist?" that there was, in poems like Chaka, "an abnormal development of the one aspect at the expense of the others"³⁷, for Senghor had projected only the creative and exotic, without exploring the destructive which, as (Yoruba) mythic dictates imply, is a prerequisite for such creativity. Soyinka himself would write about the legendary King, invoking his spirit in the war against racism and injustice which informs Ogun Abibimãñ, but unlike Senghor's King, Soyinka's Shaka is shown to suffer from manic depression with disastrous consequences on the battlefield, so that he shares "a history which reminds us" as Soyinka stated, "of a similar lapse in Ogun's own leadership of men."³⁸ Thus

Beset by demons of blood, Shaka reaped
 Harvests of manhood when time wavered

³⁶ Léopold Sedar Senghor, Léopold Sedar Senghor: Prose and Poetry selected and trns. John Reed and Clive Wake (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.148.

³⁷ Wole Soyinka, "And After the Narcissist?," African Forum 1 no.4, Spring 1966. p.59.

³⁸ Wole Soyinka, Ogun Abibiman (London: Rex Collings, 1976), p.23.

Uncertainly and the mind was transposed in
Another place.³⁹

Soyinka's agenda in A Dance was to rehabilitate and revitalize his Yoruba culture primarily for a contemporary African post-colonial audience. The figure of Demoke, a privileged artist, in whose hands rest the possibilities for the future and who submits to a great ordeal in trying to fulfil his obligations, was meant to serve as a dramatic example to the audience of its own responsibilities at such a significant time in its country's history. In this respect, Ngugi's criticism of Soyinka for a "liberal humanism (which) leads him to admire an individual's lone act of courage (at the expense of) the creative struggle of the masses"⁴⁰ needs mention. It is certainly the case that in A Dance, although the toiling masses are given a voice through the ants in the play, the possibility for social regeneration is shown to lie if at all solely with Demoke, the Ogun-like protagonist. The emphasis is on an **individual** "hubristic assertion" even if it is for collective regeneration. But this need not necessarily be a disabling act. For the logic of Soyinka's position is that the community will struggle behind the individual. Both Rola and the Old Man change having witnessed Demoke's ordeal. What is disturbing however is that by the time Soyinka came to write The Strong Breed (1964), he was imbuing his heroes with greater awareness and nobility as qualities which

³⁹ Ibid., p.15.

⁴⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Satire in Nigeria," p.69.

emanate from their **natural** and **inner** strength of character, privileging them totally above others as a "strong breed" and, as men above women in society.

In the following chapter I will discuss The Strong Breed, Death and the King's Horseman and The Bacchae of Euripides as plays in which Soyinka continues to develop the dramatization of the dictates within the Ogun myth that he had begun in A Dance, thereby arguing for their validity for contemporary reality.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORY AS RITUAL: THE STRONG BREED, DEATH AND THE KING'S
HORSEMAN AND THE BACCHAE OF EURIPIDES

Soyinka continued to reinforce, by narrativizing with varying emphases, principles enshrined in the traditional Yoruba world-view in his tragedies The Strong Breed (1964)¹, Death and the King's Horseman (written in 1973, published in 1975)² and The Bacchae of Euripides (1973)³. These works reflect the playwright's keen awareness of the close relationship between tragic plot and ritual form, for containing dramatic parallels to the myth/ritual of Ogun, their structures progress from alienation, to confrontation/sacrificial death, to restitution. Taken together, they also provide complex explorations of each stage of the rite. The Strong Breed, in dramatizing the conflict between Eman's individual will and tragic destiny is concerned with the ordeal and suffering of the tragic protagonist/sacrificial figure, while Death and the King's Horseman argues for the necessity of such sacrifice, and The Bacchae qualifies

¹ Wole Soyinka, The Strong Breed in Collected Plays 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.113-46. Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

² Wole Soyinka, Death and the King's Horseman in Six Plays (London: Methuen, 1984), pp.143-220. Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

³ Wole Soyinka, The Bacchae of Euripides in Collected Plays 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.233-307. Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

this by emphasizing the regenerative potential of sacrifice on the community. This chapter will be concerned with these emphases then, and discuss the plays as sites in which Soyinka argues for the validity of the episteme in which such rituals take place.

THE STRONG BREED

In The Strong Breed the persona of the sacrificial figure Soyinka had first delineated in the character of Demoke in A Dance is developed further. Eman belongs to a clan known as "The Strong Breed", whose men and women are called upon to pay a sacrifice for the benefit of the community in which they live. In the play, the ritual context in which this sacrifice is exacted occurs with the annual purification rite, when the sins of the community are expiated by being heaped on the shoulders of a carrier who takes his burden, in a symbolic boat, to the river where it can be washed away. Eventually, this carrier, who is honoured for his role in the village, will die while fulfilling his destined role. The women of the clan also pay a sacrifice which, being immediate, is in many ways more formidable. They die without exception when they give birth to sons. It is interesting to note however, that their sacrifice is never elaborated on in the play, but merely given as a necessary part of the destructive/creative process, and conveyed moreover only through Eman's grief at the death of Omae who has given birth to his son. "The Strong Breed" encompasses nevertheless,

a band of men **and** women who, with great moral courage undergo deprivation and even forfeit their lives, to redress what is tainted in their societies.

The cleansing rituals dramatized in the play such as the one mentioned above, and that which takes place in Jaguna's village, in which the carrier is not honoured, but humiliated and beaten with sticks and fire brands symbolizing the evils of the community and driven from the village never to enter it again, are rooted in commonplace Yoruba rituals.⁴ The Strong Breed transcends purely local concerns and practices however, for Soyinka is aware that the usage of carrier/scapegoats who sacrifice themselves willingly, or are ritually killed in reparation for an imbalance, is common in many societies. When critics like Eldred Durosimi Jones and Oyin Ogunba draw attention therefore to the many parallels in the play between Eman (whose name, significantly, means saviour) and Christ, it is really this correlative which surfaces.⁵ Soyinka himself stated,

"In The Strong Breed, for instance, I talk about the ritual of purification at the end of the year. Which again is tied up with the whole business of sacrifice, of self-sacrifice, the acceptance of the role of carrier in society on whatever level. Whether one speaks of this communally or whether one speaks of it individually, the fact is that there are beings in society

⁴ See Robin Horton, "New Year in the Delta," Nigeria Magazine 67. pp.256-96.

⁵ Eldred Durosimi Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka (London: Heinemann, 1973), Chapter 2.

Oyin Ogunba, The Movement of Transition (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975), Chapter 5.

who accept the role of sacrifice. It seems one of the pivots of social regeneration all through history...And of course I come from a society where these rituals proliferate and where even Christian

rituals are part and parcel of the same formalism of rites."⁶

For the playwright, rituals like that of Ogun's, which dramatize the penance hero-gods suffer for the regeneration of nature, are proof of society's acknowledgement of the **need** for sacrifice, and function therefore as valuable paradigms for social codes signifying the way people redress, at various levels, the imbalances in society.

Although the imperatives for sacrifice are never questioned in the play, Soyinka is not reductive either as to what that sacrifice entails for the individual, and The Strong Breed in powerfully dramatizing the suffering Eman undergoes in fulfilling his role as carrier, charts the disintegration of the ritual protagonist's will as Soyinka described in Myth, Literature and the African World.

From the beginning of the play we see Eman as a man alienated from society. He is away from home in a new village where he has been residing for less than a year (he is unaware of the customs of its annual purification rite), and has

⁶ Wole Soyinka, "Soyinka in Zimbabwe: A Question and Answer Session," ed. James Gibbs, The Literary Half-Yearly 28, no.2, July 1987. p.98.

deliberately kept away from integrating socially, although he has, by setting up a clinic, provided health care for the community and is known as "teacher" among its people. His reticence and reluctance to commit himself emotionally to his new life is evident above all in his relationship with Sunma, the daughter of the village chieftain Jaguna. Sunma who helps Eman in the clinic is in love with him, and seeks a relationship the latter refuses however to commit himself to. The reasons for this are never explicitly stated, but subtly implied both through Eman's responses to Sunma and the unravelling of his destiny in the play.

Their relationship has, at the opening of the play, reached a point of crisis. Sunma, aware of the dangers confronting Eman as a stranger in a village in which only strangers are used as carriers in the purification rite which is to take place, pleads with him to leave the village with her if just for the night. Eman is however impervious to her pleas. He is determined to remain and urges her to go her own way - in effect, refusing to pledge himself to a long-term relationship with her, while also taking, wittingly or unwittingly, the first step towards the sacrifice he will pay ultimately with his life. For isolation is of paramount importance to Eman. He tells Sunma, "Those who have much to give fulfil themselves only in total loneliness" (SB, p.125), and his alienation is shown in the play to be the **price** Eman has to pay for belonging to the strong breed, and his aloofness a defence against the hurt of having to rescind such

relationships when called upon to pay the sacrifice.

Eman steels himself against the natural forces of life, but it becomes obvious that his discipline/"heroism" also has its destructive side. In creating an emotional barrier around himself Eman remains essentially selfish. He is deliberately cold towards Sunma, and tells her (the only person in the village who has befriended him and tries to save him) with chilling bluntness, "I am incapable of feeling indebted to you." (SB, p.123) He appears indifferent to her, and her remonstrance "Ifada can rouse your pity. And yet if anything, I need more kindness from you" (SB, p.118) reflects her helplessness. For Ifada, the "idiot boy", stands for society's need for the care and dedication educated people like Eman have to give. It is precisely in recognition of this need that Eman befriends Ifada, encouraging him for instance to cultivate land and be independent. Ostracized by society for his handicap however, Ifada is shown as needing only a pat on the head to be content, whereas Sunma demands a far deeper commitment from Eman he is both unwilling and unable to give.

Sunma is not the only person to suffer as a consequence of Eman's steely self-discipline. The flashback scenes in the play which serve as structural metaphors illustrating the importance of the past in illuminating the present, dramatize Eman's past in his home village. In one of them we see further evidence of what comes across as selfish primness on his part. Eman is at an educational/initiation camp where his young girl friend Omae

visits him surreptitiously. While her visit undoubtedly jeopardizes his initiation, the harshness with which he reprimands her for visiting him, displays a surprising priggishness and selfishness, for it is for his **reputation** that he is above all concerned. Moreover, when he decides to leave his home village, disillusioned with a corrupt establishment represented by his lecherous tutor (the tutor, like Egbo's grandfather who controlled many smuggling routes⁷ and the corrupt Kadiye in The Swamp Dwellers is a figure through which Soyinka acknowledges the tainted elements of the traditional past), and also because he wants to be alone, to go, as he tells Omae "where no one can help...in order to test his strength" (SB, pp.138-9), it is with the briefest explanation that he leaves, on a tone that verges on the dismissive. He tells the hapless Omae, "This is a good moment to go. Nothing ties me down" (SB, p.141), although of course, he would like Omae to remain faithful to him (with a "you must do as you please" thrown in) for the unspecified length of time he plans to be away. In disciplining himself in order to gain strength for the role he has to fulfil then, Eman is dismissive of the claims of others on him, and indeed even his own personal responsibility towards them. And while we realize that this is partly a defence - his refusal to get involved with Sunma may well emanate from his need to protect her, for he knows that the women of the strong breed are condemned to die giving birth to sons - we cannot excuse his

⁷ Wole Soyinka, The Interpreters (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), p.13.

callousness and refusal to give others choice regarding their own lives.

Significantly, there is no criticism on Soyinka's part of Eman's behaviour in the play, and many critics have likewise accepted Eman's conduct unquestioningly. Oyin Ogunba states, "(Eman) has totally rejected the world of the Tutor, with its corruption, selfishness and lust. But in doing so he has also reacted extravagantly, for he seems determined to make himself a complete antithesis of the Tutor. He is the "new" teacher, completely selfless in all his dealings, a succour to the poor and afflicted."⁸ Ogunba takes into account here Eman's extreme reactions and the deprivations the latter suffers, but he ignores the fact that far from being selfless, it is really a selfishness that is at the core of Eman's self-discipline, and that it has a destructive effect on those who love him.

Such a lack of criticism privileges Eman, and invests in him an elitism which is disturbing, for it makes claims for a special category of men who, unaided by elements other than their own individual, **natural** qualities which are necessarily positive and strong, are shown to be able to redeem society and are therefore vital to it. As E.D.Jones comments, Eman "is a moral force without which the village would remain unregenerated in spite of the ritual of annual sacrifice."⁹ The effect of

⁸ Oyin Ogunba, The Movement of Transition, p.111.

⁹ Eldred Durosimi Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka, p.74.

Soyinka's privileging of Eman in the play is reflected in fact in Jones's reading of the text. Comparing Eman and Sunma, Jones comments of the latter, "In her consciousness of evil and her instinctive desire to run away from something she has come to hate, Sunma is a good humane person, but unlike Eman, an **ordinarily** good, humane person. She lacks the strength of an **exceptionally** good, humane person such as Eman is. (Eman is after all one of the Strong Breed - an exceptional breed as the play makes clear.)"¹⁰ We see from this how easily Jones has accepted the notion of the **strong** breed. He does not question Eman's deeply unsatisfactory responses to the women who love him - he states in fact that "Eman represents a responsiveness to human need wherever it arises"¹¹ - and accepts Eman's qualities of leadership unquestioningly as those which emanate purely from an **inner** strength of character.

In charting the ordeal Eman faces in fulfilling his duty, the play only serves to reinforce the extraordinariness of men like him. As Jones states, "Through the concept of the Strong Breed Soyinka makes the point that the quality of personal leadership through suffering is not a common characteristic. It is rare. This is well symbolized in the notion of the carrier. The role carries with it a tremendous moral burden at which strong men flinch" so much so that in Jaguna's village, they

¹⁰ Ibid., p.75.

¹¹ Ibid., p.73.

cannot even find a man who willingly takes on the role.¹² Although Soyinka's statement at the drama workshop in Zimbabwe made clear that his intention was to use Eman as a symbol of **all** those who, at various levels and both communally and individually take on sacrificial roles to redress society's ills, The Strong Breed, together with works like The Interpreters and Season of Anomy serve to imbue an elite, educated and skilled class to which Eman, the Interpreters and Ofeyi belong, with great significance for their regenerative potential. They are also privileged as men above the women in society.

And yet, when one examines the source of the dramatic tension in the play - the conflict between predestined fate and the individual's struggle against it - we come across the human face of Eman. From the beginning, his fate is hinted at as being dark and foreboding, and we share Sunma's anxiety for him. It is an anxiety heightened by the sense of menace Soyinka constructs in the play by having its dramatic action take place after dusk and during the night - and therefore in a darkness associated with evil and fear of the unknown; attention to detail such as having Sunma light an extra lamp outside the hut in protection against this darkness - her action itself reinforcing the menacing forces it encompasses; a game of ayo played not in joy but silence; a strange girl who lurks around with a sinister effigy etc. Although Eman is aware of his duty and has been preparing for it all his life, as it is one which exacts great

¹² Ibid., p.77.

suffering, Soyinka realistically shows him to hesitate and flinch at it. When Ifada who is caught by the villagers to be their carrier runs to Eman for refuge therefore, we do not see Eman immediately offering himself as a substitute. In fact, he just stares after the captured Ifada despite Jaguna's taunt, "There is only one other stranger in the village, but I have not heard him offer himself (spits.) It is easy to talk is it not?" (SB, p.130)

There is however, a simultaneous sense of inevitability which pervades the play. In Eman's decision to remain in the village on the night of its purification rite, the donating of his babu to the girl who clothes her effigy which is a symbol of the carrier, in it, the flashback scenes which establish Eman's link with ancient traditions and therefore the duties they imply, are deeds and images which signify the inevitability of the individual's confrontation with his/her destiny. As Eman's father says, one ultimately "answer(s) the urge of (one's) blood." (SB, p.134) It is a disturbing statement for it reinforces once again an elitism, implying that a call to revolutionary action/ sacrifice lies only within an exceptional individual. In the context of the play then, although Eman hesitates at his duty at first, because he is such an exceptional individual, he is shown to finally accept his hereditary role as carrier and take the place of Ifada. We see him thereafter suffering the taunts and beatings of the villagers as they symbolically expiate their sins through him.

Unlike his father and the protagonists of the Oshun festival who, throughout their ordeal "manifests", as Soyinka describes, "all the qualities of patience, of tolerance, of forgiveness... (which) serves as a kind of moral lesson, an example, to the rest of the community"¹³, Eman constantly attempts to run away from his. His actions are in fact a source of bewilderment to the villagers themselves. Although Òroge recognizes him as one "who would let himself be beaten from night till dawn and not utter a sound", both he and Jaguna question Eman's contradictory behaviour. But while Jaguna is characteristically quick to condemn him as a coward, Òroge on the other hand voices his deeper understanding of Eman's predicament when he says "It is not many unprepared minds will remain unhinged under the load." (SB,p.132)

Òroge's comment throws into focus what Soyinka dramatizes at a deeper level here, for the suffering of Eman parallels an important stage of the Ogun rite, which is the disintegration of the tragic protagonist's will. As Soyinka describes in Myth, Literature and the African World, the ritual protagonist, enacting Ogun's passage through the abyss of transition, undergoes an experience of disintegration in which his spirit is tested and his "psychic resources laid under stress by the forces most inimical to individual assertion". (Myth,p.150) Earlier, Soyinka had described Ogun as having "experienced the process of

¹³ Wole Soyinka, "Soyinka in Zimbabwe," pp.65-6.

being literally torn asunder in cosmic winds" when forging a path to earth, to regain complementarity with man. (Myth, p.30) As Eman is taunted by the villagers, spat upon and beaten with sticks until we see him bleeding as he hides by some shrubs (SB, p.132), it is this parallel to Ogun's suffering that is underscored in the play. Ogun was able to combat the inimical forces of the chthonic realm by asserting his will. Eman's suffering on the other hand goads him to return to the village for a drink of water which proves fatal. For it is taboo for the carrier who has been driven away from the village to re-enter it, and Eman dies as he falls into a trap laid for him by the villagers.

An awareness of this parallel is essential to a reading of The Strong Breed, because critics who have ignored this have ended up inevitably misreading the text. E.D.Jones states in fact that "Eman's extraordinary strength...enables him to keep his composure in the face of evil."¹⁴ Stephen Larsen commented of Eman's conduct, "The probable explanation for this seemingly inconsistent behaviour is that Eman has realized that he can open the eyes of the villagers only by making the ultimate sacrifice. If he had merely played the part of the scapegoat exactly as accepted, no spiritual regeneration would have been possible. In this case, the ceremony would only have been repeated year after year, with new, completely useless suffering for new

¹⁴ Eldred Durosimi Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka, p.75.

scapegoats."¹⁵

Apart from implying that Eman is totally in control of himself and his surroundings, which the text of the play does not support, Larsen's statement indicates an anxiety on the critic's part to give the play closure, although Soyinka makes it perfectly clear that all is not as it should be at the end. The villagers end up "subdued and guilty", both at the fate that has befallen Eman and the apprehension that emanates from their awareness that the purification rite has gone unexpectedly, and been in some way, tainted. Moreover, it is by no means clear that Eman's sacrifice **has** had a positive regenerative effect. Jaguna's last line "There are those who will pay for this night's work" (SB, p.146) captures the essence of this ambiguity. It may signify his awareness of how the community will, or has changed, after a night in which it was unable to customarily curse the carrier - Jaguna describes, "One and all they looked up at the man and words died in their throats" (SB.p.146), or his determination to punish those (like Sunma for instance) who have made this rite go horribly wrong from his point of view.

What the events of The Strong Breed also point to then, is the contradictions at the heart of the Ogun myth itself. In dramatizing the dialectic between the necessity or the inevitability of sacrifice, and the human impulse to get away

¹⁵ Stephen Larsen, A Writer and His Gods (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1983), p.92.

from it, Soyinka alerts us, as he did in A Dance through to The Bacchae of Euripides, to the contradictory aspects of the sacrifice and life itself which, as he described in Myth, Literature and the African World, were within the grasp of the Yoruba world-view. And it is the ambivalent tension which emanates from the **conflict** of these contradictory elements that contribute to the strengths of The Strong Breed. Making no attempt to efface contradiction, Soyinka indicates in the play that sacrifice, however much it may be an agent of regeneration, also destroys what is valuable. It is not only Eman who, bearing the immediate physical and mental brunt of the sacrifice who suffers, but also Sunma and Ifada who are broken by the experience and left alone to comfort each other. One recalls Soyinka's statement in The Man Died when describing his own ordeal and that of his family when he was arrested by the Nigerian Federal Authorities in early 1967 and held in detention without trial until October 1969. Paying the price for having asserted himself against an increasingly authoritarian and repressive regime, Soyinka felt that his spell in prison, in solitary confinement for long periods, deprived of books and contact with his family and friends, was his own journey through the transitional abyss. He wrote, "Again and again I recognize this territory of existence. I know that I have come to this point of the cycle more than once" and stated, "this ritual of transition is a perpetual one and...the acquisition of experience

in fording the pass does not lessen its overwhelming sadness".¹⁶ It isn't surprising then that in The Strong Breed, the Old Man, (Eman's father) who has himself fulfilled his role as carrier unquestioningly, attempts to save his son from the same fate by pointing to the opposite direction when Eman tries to follow him. (SB, p.145)

Soyinka does not express simple statements as to the regenerative potential of sacrifice either, for he shows in the figure of Jaguna, the powerful and harsh forces of injustice that operate in contemporary society. Although the imperatives for opposing what Jaguna represents are clear, the outcome of such action is not. As noted earlier, the ending of the play is subdued and uncertain. In this it is similar to that of Kongi's Harvest which also ends on a note of uncertainty as to whether the coup against the dictator Kongi led by Daodu has been successful or not.

It is significant that both The Strong Breed and Kongi's Harvest were written at a time when it had become clear that aspirations voiced and looked to at the time of Nigeria's independence had been unfulfilled, even corrupted, and a climate

¹⁶ Wole Soyinka, The Man Died (London: Rex Collings, 1985), p.88. The Strong Breed was written in 1964, before Soyinka was taken to prison. But the "pattern of awareness" which pointed to correlatives between contemporary experience and dictates enshrined in the Ogun myth had been with Soyinka from A Dance of the Forests (1960) onwards. Thus by the time he was in prison, Soyinka was able to state that the "abyss of transition" was for him, a familiar one.

of political violence which led to the civil war of 1967-1969 had begun to prevail in the country. Abiola Irele noted that, "Kongi's Harvest.. provides an indication of a new realization of social experience imposing itself on the mind of Soyinka".¹⁷ The recognition of such political reality on Soyinka's part was by no means new however, for it was against such forces that he had warned in A Dance of the Forests. But whereas he had drawn on an imaginatively re-created past history in that play, in both The Strong Breed and Kongi's Harvest he was responding to a build up of inimical forces in the immediate political climate in which he was living. Thus while Soyinka celebrated dictates of the Ogun myth on the one hand, he was unable, given the harsh reality of the Nigerian situation, to be sure that these dictates would indeed rouse communal consciousness and lead to the required change in society on the other. In The Strong Breed, given the power of a character like Jaguna, the contamination and inhospitality of the village - Sunma asks Eman, "Have you not noticed how tightly we shut out strangers?" (SB, p.123) and admits of her own people, "I know they are evil" (SB,p.121) - the efficacy of Eman's sacrifice to change such evil cannot be taken for granted.

The ambivalence and open-endedness of The Strong Breed allows at least for hope that Eman's sacrifice can secure the necessary change in society. The plays Soyinka wrote after his

¹⁷ Abiola Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology (London: Heinemann, 1981), p.199.

prison experience like Madmen and Specialists (1971) and A Play of Giants (1984) are dark and cynical and hold no hope for the future whatever. At the end of Madmen for instance, we are left with the feeling that neither the Earth Mothers nor of course the professional "healers" of society like Dr. Bero who, repudiating spirituality, perversely pursues a goal of absolute power, have the ability to heal a sick and ravaged society. In The Strong Breed on the other hand, Eman's acceptance of his duty and with it, his return to traditional dictates implies that in indigenous epistemes, there can be found values which enable contemporary wo/man to confront such reality if s/he looks for them.

DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN

No ambivalence attends Death and the King's Horseman about which Soyinka stated, "the idea was so compact from beginning to end, everything was set and it followed the pattern in my mind, straight, all the way through."¹⁸ In its foreword Soyinka states that the play is set around events which occurred in Oyo in 1946 in which "the lives of Elesin (Olori Elesin), his son, and the Colonial District Officer intertwined with the disastrous results set out in the play." (Death, p.144) What Soyinka refers to are the events which followed the death of the King/Alafin of Oyo, Siyanbola Ladugbolu. When the king dies, his horseman is required to ritually commit suicide on the day of the king's

¹⁸ Wole Soyinka, "Soyinka in Zimbabwe," p.76.

funeral which takes place a month later, in order to prepare the way and accompany the king into the world of the dead. In 1946, the colonial district officer at the time, Captain W.A. Ross, intervened in the suicide bid of the Alafin's horseman, implementing the colonial government's policy of forbidding human sacrifice. It was an intervention which resulted however in the death of the horseman's son, a trader in Ghana, who committed suicide in his father's place.¹⁹

Soyinka introduces, for reasons which will be discussed later, incidents and characters of his own into the play. There is the "wedding" of Elesin on the night of the king's funeral, and Elesin's son Olunde is not a trader like the son who took his father's place in the actual incident but a western-educated doctor. Soyinka however keeps the colonial intervention as it occurred in the 1946 incident. But, in the foreword to the play, he warns that the essence of Death would be lost if one concentrates, reductively in his opinion, on the clash of the alien and indigenous that critics have read into the district officer's intervention, and calls for the audience/ reader to concentrate instead on "the far more difficult and risky task of eliciting the play's threnodic essence." (Death, p.144) Soyinka stated, "The colonial Factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe

¹⁹ Margaret Folarin, "Cross-Cultural Material in the work of E.M. Forster, Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott," Ph.D thesis, University of Ifé, 1988. pp.315-6.

of the Yoruba mind - the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition. Death and the King's Horseman can be fully realised only through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition." (Death, p.145)

What one has here is an affirmation that in the play, Soyinka is concerned above all with the paradigmatic value Yoruba rituals have to offer for contemporary life. Elesin, as the king's horseman, has led a privileged life. As he acknowledges,

"My master's hands and mine have always
Dipped together and, home or sacred feast,
The bowl was beaten bronze, the meats
So succulent our teeth accused us of neglect.
We shared the choicest of the season's
Harvest of yams. How my friend would read
Desire in my eyes before I know the cause -
However rare, however precious, it was mine.
...The world was mine."

(Death, p.153)

His suicide however is the price Elesin has to pay for such privileges, so that it is a death he rationalizes as the natural and only course left once those privileges, his only while the king is alive, are no longer available to him. He states, "A life that will outlive/ Fame and friendship begs another name" and that "Life is honour. It ends when honour ends." (Death, p.154)

As the king's attendant and the community's emissary to the world of the dead, Elesin is feted by the praise-singer and market women in the play, and the degree to which his honour is inextricably linked to his participation in the ritual suicide is brought out through the "wedding" scene Soyinka weaves into

the play. On the night of the funeral, Elesin, whose sexual appetite and prowess have been celebrated throughout, spies a young woman and expresses his sexual desire for her. His bargaining power as "one whose foot is on the threshold of (the ancestor's) abode" in Iyaloja's words (Death, p.161) is such that although the young woman is betrothed to Iyaloja's own son, Elesin's request for her receives Iyaloja's blessing and is acceded to by her son. For Elesin is the protagonist in a ritual sacrifice which is seen as vital to the continuation of the community's traditions, and therefore very foundations, and there is anxiety that nothing should obliterate the goodwill with which he himself is treated, and which he bestows on the people as he departs for the world of the dead.

The successful completion of the ritual becomes all the more important then both for the sacrifices the people have themselves made, and their dependence on Elesin for the regeneration of their community. Moreover as the world which constitutes this community is shown by Soyinka through subtle use of images and language in the play, to be rich and fully worth espousing, the burden on Elesin to fulfil his duty becomes greater. Soyinka privileges this Yoruba world through Elesin himself who is a figure full of zest and vitality reminiscent of the Baroka of Ilujinle in The Lion and the Jewel. He speaks mostly in proverbs, nuggets of collective material and philosophical observation which served from ancient time in oral societies like the Yoruba, as mnemonic devices, helping the

people commit their verities to memory and thereby learn from them. Elesin's facility with proverbs root him firmly to its particular tradition and give credence to his versatility. For as Nketia stated, "(Proverbs) are considered a mark of eloquence and wit, (so that) anyone who is able to quote or use proverbs habitually may be regarded as a poet of a sort."²⁰ Elesin's language is certainly full of poetic images, and although as David Richards notes, after his humiliation, caused by his inability to commit suicide, Elesin no longer speaks in proverbs "since he has lost the right to utter the linguistic summations of the 'Yoruba world' which proverbs express"²¹, Elesin does nevertheless continue to express himself in a poetic and dignified language in his dealings with the District Officer Simon Pilkings, which is in contrast to the flat diction of the colonial authorities themselves and the caricatured Nigerian English of servants like Amusa and Joseph in the play.

The presence of such poetry and movement in Death reflects moreover their life in ritual itself. Soyinka stated in Myth, Literature and the African World, the tragic protagonist "is saved only by channelling the dark torrent into the plastic light of poetry and dance; not however as a reflection or illusion of reality, but as the celebrative aspects of the resolved crisis

²⁰ Quoted in O.R.Dathorne, The Black Mind (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), p.37.

²¹ David Richards, "Owe l'esin òrò: Proverbs like Horses: Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 19, no.1, 1984. p.96.

of his gods." (Myth, p.160) The poetry of the praise-singer as he takes on the voices of both Alafin and community, and Elesin as he enters into the ritual of transition then is both a way into the "abyss of transition" as well as a celebration of the episteme in which such drama of the gods and commemorative ritual take place.

Soyinka privileges this world not just through poetry but constant comparison with European colonial culture as well. Although he warned in the play's foreword that critics reading a "clash of cultures" in the text would be missing its central preoccupation with "a facile tag", the Europeans in Death do exist nevertheless as foils against the Yoruba characters - the importance of their function as such ironically acknowledged by Soyinka when he replied the question "Have you ever been anxious to write a play about the clash of cultures?" with "No. I don't know that I ever have been consciously anxious to do that - except, perhaps in Death and the King's Horseman."²² It is a clash in which, as James Booth shows in his essay "Self-Sacrifice and Human Sacrifice in Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman"²³, the British characters do not fare well and fail to elicit audience sympathy. They are portrayed as insensitive and arrogant. Pilkings and his wife wear egungun costumes and masks as fancy dresses, are contemptuous of Amusa for his

²² Wole Soyinka, "Soyinka in Zimbabwe," p.97.

²³ James Booth, "Self-Sacrifice and Human Sacrifice in Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman," Research in African Literatures 19, no.4, Winter 1988. pp.529-50.

"superstition" and blatantly superficial. They are shown to lack awareness of the "irreducible truths" Soyinka declared the Yoruba was familiar with. In the play, Soyinka shows that sacrifice for the benefit of others occurs at various levels in **all** communities through the incident of the British Navy captain who remains on board his endangered ship to blow himself up with it so as to minimize the danger to others. Jane is however, oblivious to the significance of such action whereas Elesin's son Olunde, firmly rooted in his indigenous Yoruba tradition which appreciates the need for such sacrifice, is shown by Soyinka to recognize it as an inspirational affirmation of life. (Death,p.193)

For Nigerian critics like Biodun Jeyifo, Soyinka's unequivocal espousal of this traditional past signifies a reactionary stance. The critic stated, "The notion of honour (and integrity and dignity) for which Soyinka in the play provides a metaphysical rationalization, rests on the patriarchal feudalist code of the ancient Oyo kingdom, a code built on class entrenchment and class consolidation." According to Jeyifo what Soyinka espouses in the play is in effect "the role of the dazzling FEW (such as Elesin)" over the masses, for "Elesin is lauded, feted and celebrated by his retinue, and the women...as **naturally** due to a man on whose personal destiny rests the integrity and maintenance of a vision of life which holds society together."²⁴ It is certainly the case that in privileging

²⁴ Biodun Jeyifo, "Tragedy, History and Ideology: Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman and Ebrahim Hussein's Kinjeketile," Marxism and African Literature ed. George Gugelberger (London:

Elesin's world, Soyinka uncritically validates and prolongs an elitist notion of honour that binds that particular society. And once again emphasis is laid on the protagonist's **natural** qualities. Referring to Elesin, a market woman tells Amusa, "You ignorant man. It is not he who calls himself Elesin Oba, it is his blood that says it" (Death, p.175), echoing Eman's father's statement in The Strong Breed that one answers to duty according to the urge of one's blood. Soyinka moreover refuses to discuss in the play the material socio-political structures which gave rise to the type of sacrificial ritual Elesin is protagonist in. James Booth draws attention for instance to Rev. Samuel Johnson's citing in The History of the Yoruba, that at one time the crown prince was compelled to die with the alafin as insurance against parricide.²⁵ Soyinka's emphasis however is not on the material origins of these Yoruba rituals but their metaphysical content, and above all, their paradigmatic value for contemporary society.

What has to be marked then is that writing in English, and writing moreover about the privileged, Soyinka also writes **for** a privileged audience. Just as he explored the theme of obligations attending such privilege in A Dance through the figure of Demoke on whom, as a renowned poet and sculptor, moral responsibility concerning the future of his society was shown to rest, in Death and the King's Horseman Soyinka addresses an

James Currey, 1985), p.102.

²⁵ James Booth, "Self-Sacrifice and Human Sacrifice," p.545.

audience as advantaged as Elesin with the same message. Privilege, by virtue of education, talent, intelligence, profession, wealth, power, social status demands in turn an obligation by those enjoying it to work for the creation of justice and peace in society. It is however an obligation which, paradoxically, may entail the sacrifice of these very privileges.

As in The Strong Breed Soyinka shows the sacrifice itself to be formidable, and one that human beings naturally balk at. Both Elesin's "wedding" scene and Soyinka's indication that the intervention of Pilkings is only a catalytic event in the play, function to alert us to the fact that the tragedy in Death also occurs as a result of a weakness **within** Elesin himself. On a night when he is preparing himself for death, Elesin allows his sexual desire for a woman to take precedence over his duty. It is a distraction which is anchored in a natural fear of death. Ketu Katrak noted that as the dead, living and the unborn coexist in Yoruba time, "Death is not seen as the final event of human life but rather as an intermediary stage which leads people from this world into the next" so that the power of death itself is in the play, neutralized.²⁶ Elesin may assure his retinue, "I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes/ Watch me dance along the narrowing path/ Glazed by the soles of my great precursors./ My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside" (Death, p.153), but Soyinka shows in a skilful and subtle way through the story of the Not

²⁶ Ketu Katrak, Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy, p.59.

I bird that Elesin relates, and the repeated questioning of the praise-singer as to what happens after death, the fear of the unknown and therefore death, within both individual and community. It is a fear which makes Elesin cling to his earthly life a little longer by dallying with the young woman, and deludes him, as he later admits, into seeing that "there might be the hand of the god in a stranger's intervention" (Death, p.212), prompting him to blame his humiliation on the insensitivity and interference of colonial authority. In reality however, as Iyaloja notes, it is his own fear of death and consequent lack of resolve that urges Elesin to indulge his sexual desire, postponing his suicide, and makes him comply easily with the intervening colonial authorities. Elesin's weakness prevents him then from achieving what he has been groomed to do and honoured for all his life. The paradigmatic value of this is clear. Whatever the external factors, the fault of not pursuing the required course of action to redress what is wrong and ensure a better future, lies also in one's own lack of resolve and therefore, within oneself.

It is Olunde who, on hearing of the king's death, returns from medical studies in England to Nigeria in order to bury his father whom he knows must die, who finally pays reparation with his life for what his father was unable to fulfil. In killing himself he ensures the continuation of the community's traditions. Olunde is however, an unsatisfactory dramatic creation. Despite his western education, his medical training

with which he could be of vital assistance to his community, Olunde retains a dogmatic faith in indigenous rites which is incredible. His belief in communal over individual needs which makes him resolute and determined without any of Eman's hesitancy to die in his father's place, strikes an unconvincing note. Olunde functions in the play then as a figure through which Soyinka effaces contradiction and conflict to construct a cohesive Yoruba identity. One recalls a similar presentation of cohesion in Season of Anomy in which the young men of Aiyero who, never "corrupted" by the city and the material wealth it has to offer, always return to the village to continue its traditional way of life. As Pa Ahime claims assuredly, "All our people know from where we came, and they know that we founded Aiyero to seek truth, a better life, all the things which men run after. They also believe that we found it. That is why our children always come back." (Season, p.9) But this is, ultimately, to romanticize the traditional, the "pastoral" way of life.

Soyinka is more realistic in Death, for he shows that Olunde's death does not rehabilitate the community to what it was before Elesin's tragedy. Like the villagers in The Strong Breed, the indigenous community in Death is very aware of the rupture of its familiar world. The praise-singer states "What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk, and we know this is not the way of life. Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers" (Death, p.218), aware that a world in which the son

takes the father's place, the young die instead of the old, is one which is displaced. Olunde's death does nevertheless restore the honour, in Iyaloja's words, of Elesin's household and community (Death, p.218), and in perpetuating the ancient ritual, validates the world in which such rites take place.

On a paradigmatic level then, Olunde is one who makes the necessary sacrifice for the restitution of harmony in his society. In doing so he is a member of the contemporary elite who has, unlike Sagoe, Egbo and Kola of The Interpreters who evade their socio-political responsibilities warped by cynicism and hindered by a lack of self-awareness, taken his duties and obligations seriously, even to an extreme. Gareth Griffiths and David Moody draw our attention to the young girls at the market, arguing that they are Olunde's contemporaries, but those who respond to colonial interference and fight to preserve the identity of their society in a radically different and less extreme way.²⁷ The taunting of Amusa for being a "jester in khaki and starch" and one who "no longer knows his mother" by the girls (Death, p.177) is however, a protest which does not challenge the impositions of alien values on their society in any radical way. When Olunde has to **die** on the other hand to preserve the identity and cohesion of his community in the face of these outside impositions, his challenge is serious and tragic.

²⁷ Gareth Griffiths and David Moody, "Of Marxism and Missionaries: Soyinka and the Survival of Universalism in Post-Colonial Literary Theory," Kunapipi 11, no.1, 1989. p.81.

Ultimately however, the extremity of both the required ritual death of the horseman and Olunde's suicide have the power to mar the play although theatrically, they contribute to its tragic essence. For although Death addresses a contemporary elite with a powerful message of social responsibility, in the theatrical idiom in which the play is presented, the ritual sacrifice of death can have an ambivalent impact on the audience. While it enhances the tragic essence of Soyinka's plays, in being the ultimate sacrifice one can/has to pay (and it must be noted here that these moments are always powerfully evoked by Soyinka, for although the deaths of Eman, Elesin, Olunde, Pentheus, the Professor take place off-stage, Soyinka imbues the moment on stage with tension and intense tragedy with superbly consistent craftsmanship), it can distance the audience with a sense of shock rather than provoke the guilt and discomfort needed to rouse its political consciousness on the other.

In the final analysis, the end of the play is unsatisfactory because Olunde's suicide in particular is not dramatized as an event which grows out of the action and is therefore organic to the play, but a solution imposed by Soyinka to achieve a facile cohesion at the end. It is significant that the play was written in 1973 when Soyinka was at Cambridge as a Fellow of Churchill College, and, as he indicated in the preface to Myth, the victim of patronizing racism on the part of the English Department which, in his words, "did not believe in any such mythical beast as "African literature". (Myth, p.vii) The intense celebration of

the Yoruba world in Death, expressed through the vitality of Elesin, the praise chants, dance and the poetry of its language, in contrast to the hollow and caricatured figures of British colonial authority was no doubt, a response to this marginalization.

Death and the King's Horseman encompasses then a re-articulation of identity on Soyinka's part which could not permit ambivalence and leave room for doubt. It was a challenge to the coloniser that required at the end, an effacement of the contradictions that were shown to exist within the community throughout the play - the celebration and fear of death, the obligation of fulfilling duty and evasion of it, honour versus humiliation, African versus European. Olunde's suicide then is a device through which these disparate elements are forced together and contradictions effaced, making the traditional Yoruba world cohesive and whole. It is a death which is moreover meant to prove that this indigenous world is worth preserving at whatever cost. And it is this absolute on the part of Soyinka which ultimately leaves us uneasy at the end, however moved we are by Elesin's personal tragedy.

THE BACCHAE OF EURIPIDES

The Bacchae of Euripides, commissioned by the National Theatre London and first performed in 1973 is, as its title implies, an adaptation of Euripides's The Bacchae²⁸, which Soyinka called "the finest extant drama of the social coming- into-being of a semi-European deity". (Myth, p.12) It isn't difficult to see why Soyinka is particularly responsive to this play. The Greek pantheon resembles the Yoruba, although Soyinka took pains in Myth to warn that it differs from the Yoruba in lacking "the morality of reparation", for it does not punish its gods for their transgressions as the Yoruba does. (Myth, p.14) But there are distinct parallels between the Delphic oracle and the Ifa corpus, and in particular, significant similarities in the myths and cults of Dionysus, the god at the centre of The Bacchae, and Soyinka's own patron god Ogun. They are correlatives reinforced in Soyinka's play by the Bacchante who invoke Dionysus with lines taken directly from Idanre and oriki verses, the praise chants of Ogun.²⁹

The symbols of the two deities are similar, the thyrsus of Dionysus, a phallic staff tipped by a pine cone entwined with ivy and vine leaves, resembling the equally phallic Opa Ogun, a long pole topped by a lump of ore and bound in palm frond. Wine is sacred to both so that while grape wine is consumed at Dionysiac

²⁸ Euripides, The Bacchae trns. Gilbert Murray (London: George Allen, 1904). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

²⁹ See Stephen Larsen, A Writer and His Gods, pp.85-8.

rites, palm wine is drunk at Ogun's. Moreover, there are striking similarities in the cult practices of the two, and Gilbert Murray whose translation of The Bacchae Soyinka acknowledges in his adaptation (Bacchae, p.234), provides a useful description of Dionysiac rites although Murray's cultural arrogance was the type of narrow Eurocentrism Soyinka challenged throughout his work. Murray stated,

A curious relic of primitive superstition and cruelty remained firmly embedded in Orphism - a doctrine irrational and unintelligible, and for that very reason wrapped in the deepest and most sacred mystery: a belief in the sacrifice of Dionysus himself, and the purification of man by his blood.

It seems possible that the savage Thracians, in the fury of their worship on the mountains, when they were possessed by the God and became "wild beasts," actually tore with their teeth and hands any hares, goats, fawns, or the like that they came across...The wild beast they tore was, of course, the savage God himself. And by one of those curious confusions of thought, which seem so inconceivable to us and so absolutely natural and obvious to primitive man, the beast torn was also a God! The Orphic congregation of later times, in their most holy gatherings, solemnly partook of the blood of a bull, which was, by a mystery, the blood of Dionysus-Zagreus himself.³⁰

It is ironic that Murray ignores his own Christian practise which incorporates similar ritual in the communion rite involving the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The significance of such ritual does not go unrecognized by Soyinka however, who acknowledges the

³⁰ Gilbert Murray trns., The Bacchae by Euripides (London: George Allen, 1904), pp.85-6.

similarity between the Dionysiac rites Murray describes and which the mainly women devotees of the god, the Bacchante, follow on Mt.Kithairon in the play, and those of Ogun during which "A dog is slaughtered in sacrifice and a mock-struggle between the head priest and his acolytes for the carcass, during which it is literally torn limb from limb" takes place.³¹

For Soyinka, the celebrative ecstasy as well as violent destruction incorporated in such ritual is expressive of the contrariety the Yoruba world-view sees at the matrix of the human "condition" itself. Ogun, as has already been noted, encompasses such multiplicity being the god who harnessed the most elements of Orisa-nla. Dionysus too is described by Soyinka as embodying this duality, for the god is "Vengeful and kind", "gentle (and) jealous". (Bacchae,p.235) The wedding tableaux in the play function in fact to reinforce this duality. The god is shown to be capable of both a destructive side and an altruistic essence. The first tableau depicts the tale related by Herodotus on the marriage of Hippoclidides and Agariste during which the bridegroom, under the influence of wine (the god's drink) gains courage and walks out on his aristocratic but ugly bride. Whatever the merits of Hippoclidides's last minute courage, under the destructive influence of Dionysus, he subverts and rudely disrupts the wedding ceremony. The second tableau on the other hand is different in tone and content. Paralleling the biblical marriage

³¹ Wole Soyinka, Introduction to The Bacchae of Euripides (London: Methuen, 1973), p.vi.

at Canae, Dionysus as the Christ-figure turns water into wine to ensure that all the wedding guests have their fill, thus revealing his creative, altruistic qualities. With Dionysus expressive of the contrary forces that govern human life, Soyinka stated of Euripides's play which illustrates at many levels this contrariety of which the ancient Yoruba world too was aware, "No other play of Euripides and few others among extant Greek drama are so thoroughly impregnated with image and essence of human passage in conflict and resolution: life itself and death; womb and destroyer; order and chaos...; the ecstasy and serenity; hubris and humility; the visceral and formalistic...the list is endless. Its totality: a celebration of life, bloody, tumultuous, an extravagant rite of the human and social psyche."³²

As such a celebration of life, the play becomes for Soyinka, a "rounded rite" and therefore one which is intrinsically revolutionary. Dionysus, whose cult spread through Asia Minor and the Eastern Mediterranean during the 13th Century BC and therefore before the Greek city states came to prominence, was primarily a god of the common folk, opposed to the established order of Olympian gods to whom access could be gained only through an elite priesthood in conjunction with the State and which therefore, reinforced the authority of the State.³³ E.R.Dodd's description that Dionysus was regarded as embodying

³² Ibid., p.xi.

³³ Michael Etherton, The Development of African Drama (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1982), p.130.

"all the mysterious and **uncontrollable** tides that ebb and flow in the life of Nature" (my emphasis)³⁴, could in fact reflect the suspicion and cynicism with which the Dionysiac cult was held by the theocratic establishment, patriarchal politicians and writers, as it was the cult of the common - and significantly, women - folk which spelt the dismantling of political/sexual oppression and inhibitions. Being rites which, moreover, reinforced the productiveness of the earth, the Dionysiac religion was one peasants who worked closely with the land particularly identified with.

In Soyinka's play it is the oppressed slaves and herdsmen, and the women of Thebes then who adopt the new religion and its god for symbolizing a new revolutionary order. There is much that is in need of change in Theban society. Signs of oppression are evident from the start, as the play opens with a scene of a road lined with bodies of crucified slaves mostly in skeletal stage, and slaves are seen flailing and treading on the harvest floor. (Once again, as in Idanre a time of destruction and oppression is also one of harvest and creation.) A cleansing ritual similar to that in The Strong Breed and known as the "Eleusian Festival" is held in which a slave chosen by the regime is symbolically whipped "to cleanse the new year of the rot of the old". (Bacchae, p.237) But as K.E.Senanu points out, the true spirit of sacrifice is missing from this ritual because the already

³⁴ Quoted in Ketu Katrak, Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy, p.81.

oppressed slave carrier/scapegoat sees in his role only a further imposition of the regime on his life.³⁵ The ritual loses its efficacy to cleanse society and the corruption it was meant to erase continues to pollute the land.

As in much of Greek tragedy like Oedipus Rex or Iphigene at Taurus, the enormity of the imbalance and oppression in society requires the appeasing sacrificial victim to be from the secular elite or spiritual leadership. Tiresias who has foresight - he does not minimize the threat of the new religion to his own priesthood admitting, "A priest is not much use without a following, and that's soon washed away in what social currents he fails to sense or foresee" (Bacchae, p.243) - acknowledges this responsibility and volunteers therefore to take the place of the slave at the Eleusian ritual. But Tiresias also volunteers for the ritual whipping because he totally lacks faith in Pentheus and the latter's ability or resolve to put his house in order. The King resists Dionysus because of a family feud (Dionysus is Pentheus's cousin, but the god's mother Semele was banished from Thebes as her admission that Zeus was the father of her child fell on incredulous ears), and far more importantly, because he feels threatened by the god whose celebrative and liberating forces stand opposed to Pentheus's tyranny. Tiresias is moreover aware of the need for suffering and sacrifice if there is to be rejuvenation. When asked by Dionysus as to why he volunteered

³⁵ K.E.Senanu, "The Exigencies of Adaptation: The Case of Soyinka's Bacchae," Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka ed. James Gibbs (London: Heinemann, 1981), p.109.

for the sacrifice Tiresias replies therefore, "I have longed to know what flesh is made of. What suffering is. Feel the taste of blood instead of merely foreseeing it. Taste the ecstasy of rejuvenation after long organizing its ritual." (Bacchae,p.243)

Dionysus interrupts the Eleusian ritual however, for the sacrifice of a slave or Tiresias is inadequate. The whole establishment needs to be brought down, and the ultimate sacrifice has to be Pentheus himself. As he tells his cousin,

you alone
 Make sacrifices for your people, you alone.
 The role belongs to a king. Like those gods, who
yearly
 Must be rent to spring anew, that also
 Is the fate of heroes.

(Bacchae,p.293)

The sacrifice of Pentheus is then a precondition for the well-being of the community but it is not a sacrifice which is consciously or willingly undertaken by the king. K.E.Senanu feels it is, arguing that "What the music and the dance of transition, which first emerge in the adaptation of The Bacchae symbolize is the ecstasy, the ineffable joy and peace which accompany this process of renewal through a **freely chosen** suffering and death. Pentheus, as ruler and sacrificial priest, provides the true image of what Soyinka suggests".³⁶ But a close reading of the text indicates that Pentheus is really **duped** by Dionysus into going up Mount Kithairon to spy on the Bacchantes, encouraged into undertaking a journey which leads to his death.

³⁶ Ibid.,p.112. My emphasis.

While in the original play Euripides makes Dionysus exert gradual control over Pentheus by almost hypnotizing the latter, Soyinka makes Pentheus's transformation much more credible by having Dionysus offer his cousin wine on which the latter gets drunk, so that although he feels something amiss, Pentheus is not aware that what is put on him is not his armour but a Bacchic dress complete with jewelled brooch and wig. A Bacchante observes, "his wits are distracted", and the old slave remarks, "His thoughts are dislodged, his reason slithers./ What sane mind struts in woman's clothing/ And thinks it an armour of bronze." (Bacchae, p.290) Moreover, Soyinka himself stated in a stage direction that Dionysus' victory over Pentheus is not entirely a noble one. (Bacchae, p.294)

Unlike The Strong Breed and Death and the King's Horseman in which the nature of the sacrifice itself and its impact on the sacrificial victim become an important part of the action, Soyinka's interest in The Bacchae is on the aftermath of the sacrifice. Consequently, the Bacchantes and particularly Agave, take on important roles in the play. It is in respect of the Bacchae and the play's closure that Soyinka departs most radically from the Euripidean model. The playwright felt that in the original play, "The ending especially, the petering off of ecstasy into a suggestion of a prelude to another play"³⁷ was unsatisfactory. Fatalism pervades Euripides' play. Both Kadmos

³⁷ Wole Soyinka, Introduction to The Bacchae of Euripides, p.xi.

and Agave are seen as victims of a ruthless and cruel god and the women in particular are shown to have been singled out for punishment for their slander against Semele. The Euripidean Dionysus declares,

Thus must they vaunt; and therefore hath my rod
 On them first fallen, and stung them forth
wild-eyed
 From empty chambers...
 Yea, I have bound upon the necks of them
 The harness of my rites.³⁸

In Soyinka's The Bacchae however, the women are not victims but messengers of Dionysus. The god declares that his spirit of liberation "pounds in the blood and breasts of my wild-haired women." (Bacchae, p.235) As they engage in the ritual killing of Pentheus on Mount Kithairon, the Bacchae become in Soyinka's play, ritual participants in the sacrifice, and in transmitting their experiences to the slaves, a "communicative chorus, containing within their collective being the essence of that transitional abyss." (Myth, p.142) For Agave is aware once she has emerged from her trance, of the significance of the rite she has participated in. The death of Pentheus is a tragic burden she has to bear for she naturally grieves at the loss of her son, and just as Euripides had Kadmos and Agave lament as they go into exile, Soyinka's Kadmos also exclaims, "Dionysus is just. But he is not fair!// Though he had right on his side, he lacks/ Compassion, the deeper justice" (Bacchae, p.304), and the old slave remarks,

³⁸ Euripides, The Bacchae, p.8-9.

The ways of god are hard to understand
 We know full well that some must die, chosen
 To bear the burden of decay, lest we all die-
 ... And yet, this knowledge
 Cannot blunt the edge of pain, the cruel
 Nature of his death. Oh this is a heartless
 Deity, bitter, unnatural in his revenge.
 (Bacchae, p.300)

Agave realizes however that Pentheus's death was necessary for the restoration of a just and peaceful society. Alive to the significance of his sacrifice, she calls for celebration instead of lament. At this stage, her experience parallels that of the ritual tragic protagonist. For as Soyinka describes, "Only later, in the evenness of release from the tragic climax, does the serene self-awareness of Obatala reassert its creative control. He, the actor, emerges still as the mediant voice of the god, but stands now as it were beside himself, observant, understanding, creating. At this stage is known to him the sublime **aesthetic** joy...in the distanced celebration of the cosmic struggle." (Myth, p.143) Thus it is with complete self-awareness that Agave answers Kadmos when he laments "Why us?" She replies quietly but confidently, "Why not?" (Bacchae, p.307) As Soyinka explains her position, "Agave's final understanding is an exteriorised god-submission only on the level of itemised dramatis personae: it is far more fundamentally a recognition and acceptance of those cosmic forces for which the chorus (the communal totality) is custodian and vessel in the potency of ritual enactment. Admission of her last, aberrant mind after the enormous physic strain of a wilful challenge (also a necessity for evoking the maximum powers), this last in-

gathering releases the reluctant beneficence of Nature."³⁹ Agave is aware then, after the deed, that with her son's death, the old order has been vanquished. There is awareness amongst the participants that rejuvenation will/has taken place, and in confirmation of this, Pentheus's head spurts wine, not blood at the end. Agave, Kadmos and the Bacchae gather round to drink the wine and imbibe the "beneficence of Nature". And so, the ending of the play, so different in tone from the Euripidean one, confirms that, as Soyinka stated in his production note, "This version of The Bacchae has been conceived as a communal feast, a tumultous (sic) celebration of life."⁴⁰

The burden of these chapters has been to show that Soyinka is a writer who is urgently engaged in recouping and revitalizing his Yoruba culture at various levels and for diverse purposes. Challenging the negative images of identity imposed on him as a black African by the coloniser, the playwright re-articulates his identity for a first world audience by rehabilitating his culture through the myth and ritual of Ogun in particular, showing that their dictates have universal validity. But as my discussion of Myth, Literature and the

³⁹ Wole Soyinka, Introduction to The Bacchae, p.xi.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

African World and Soyinka's plays has shown, the playwright is also engaged in addressing a contemporary African audience, concerned with re-vitalizing Yoruba myths in a manner that makes them relevant to the present African post-colonial experience. In doing so, Soyinka seeks to return to the people what was taken away from them by a colonial enterprise which denigrated indigenous epistememes and their dictates in the first place.

It was argued that a work like Myth, Literature and the African World throws into focus the problematic of the post-colonial taking issue with her/history from within the coloniser's own discourse. While Soyinka argued against the hegemony of a general Western aesthetic theory which cannot explain the African experience adequately, as it colonizes Other experiences by reinscribing them in terms of its own standards and references, Soyinka in effect re-enacted the same project in Myth when he propounded the universal validity of his Yoruba culture. It was shown moreover that the mythic paradigms of his culture are explored through concepts such as "tragedy", "hubris" and "heroism" which are entrenched in the very Western canon Soyinka set out to challenge, and are not even appropriate when uncritically applied to a Yoruba culture which is collective and communal and therefore opposed to the elitism these terms imply. In discussing how Soyinka seeks to legitimize his culture through Western paradigms, it was shown however that this marks not a weakness on the part of the playwright as a creative writer or individual, but points to the contradictions the post-colonial

inhabits, affirming what s/he denies, denying what s/he affirms, writing from within a discourse s/he sets out to subvert, complicitous with an enterprise s/he needs to challenge.

The discussions of Soyinka's plays A Dance of the Forests, The Strong Breed, Death and the King's Horseman and The Bacchae of Euripides demonstrated that the playwright continuously illustrated dictates of the Ogun myth and ritual in his work, revitalizing them for the present by culling from them metaphors and paradigms with which to explain contemporary experience. What many critics who censure Soyinka for his refusal to overtly explore the socio-political fabric of society in his work fail to give due credence to then, is his **paradigmatic** use of Yoruba myth, mistaking its presence in his work for alternatives to history and material reality. Chidi Amuta for instance stated in an article entitled "From Myth to Ideology: The Socio-Political Content of Soyinka's War Writings", that Soyinka offers "mythic 'explanations' and resolutions for social problems which ordinarily belong to the realm of historical reality and empirical human experience"⁴¹

What Amuta fails to grasp is the fact that Soyinka does not present myths in his work as "explanations", but metaphors for patterns of history and existence. Nor do the critics recognize adequately that the mythic metaphors in Soyinka's work are tropes

⁴¹ Chidi Amuta, "From Myth to Ideology: The Socio-Political Content of Soyinka's War Writings," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 23, no.1, 1988. p.116.

with which the playwright re-articulates identity, tools with which he rehabilitates his culture for the modern world. The privileging of a mythic past then is not because it offers Soyinka a route of escape from class complicity as a critic like Geoffrey Hunt implies⁴², but speaks to him of a sophisticated indigenous episteme which has validity for contemporary experience.

While the integrity of Soyinka's creative endeavours cannot be faulted then, what can be questioned is, as has already been noted, his strategies for re-articulating identity particularly in a work like Myth, and the fact that his works, even a Dance of the Forests - his most overtly "political" play of the period - fall short of his own agenda as an African writer who needs to function in society "as the record of the mores and experience of his society **and** as the voice of vision in his own time."⁴³ That he fulfils part of this function by constantly critiquing the society in which he lives, and shows through mythic metaphors, the need, indeed imperative duty of the people to challenge the contaminated system for its rejuvenation, even if it means paying a sacrifice, cannot be denied. But what Soyinka fails to do is follow through with his criticism of society to explore ways and means of effectively challenging what is corrupt in the

⁴² See Geoffrey Hunt, "Two African Aesthetics: Soyinka vs Cabral," Marxism and African Literature ed. George Gugelberger (London: James Currey, 1985), pp.64-93.

⁴³ Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," Art, Dialogue and Outrage (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988), p.20.

community. And in this respect, the anxiety of African critics who look (albeit at times to easy) solutions and blueprints for complex socio-political, economic and cultural problems cannot be dismissed either, given the fraught and often tragic nature of the post-colonial world that prevails today.

In addressing both a first world audience and an African one, Soyinka at least had a viable indigenous episteme to rehabilitate, one from which he could cull metaphors which would translate into contemporary experience. Derek Walcott on the other hand, a product of a far more deracinated history than Soyinka's, felt he had no such indigenous system to recuperate. The second part of this dissertation will discuss how Walcott negotiates his history and coloniality in his work.

CHAPTER 5MUSE OR GORGON? WALCOTT AND HISTORY

The epistemic violence that took place in the Caribbean, has left writers like Walcott, bereft of an **ancient** indigenous tradition anchored in the land and containing tropes that can be used, to fracture the coloniser's mediations of colonial history and identity. Yoruba history offered Soyinka myths, religious rituals, rich stores of proverbs and folklore - in other words, manifestations of an old and tangible indigenous world-view - with which he could re-articulate identity. For writers in the Caribbean however, whose land has been deprived of an evolving and influential Carib and Arawak tradition, populated by those transplanted from Africa, India and China, migrants from Europe and traders from Syria, there is no such cohesive cultural legacy that can be embraced wholeheartedly if even to question, as an African writer like Achebe does, in presenting an alter/native system to that of the coloniser's.

Not only ~~does~~ this give the West Indian writers a sense of deficiency - George Lamming declared, "we have no adequate reference of traditional conduct... (and) are made to feel a sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance of function in a society whose past we can't alter, and whose future is always

beyond us"¹ - but it also holds those like Walcott in tension as direct descendants of European colonisers and those who have complicity therefore in the negative and violent aspects of their history. It is such a tension with its anguish, sense of alienation, contradiction and desire to escape this particular history that can be seen at the matrices of Walcott's essays on history - "The Muse of History"², "What the Twilight Says: An Overture"³, "The Figure of Crusoe"⁴, and "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?"⁵ which I will draw on in this chapter, discussing the playwright's responses to his history, showing how they inform his re-articulation of identity.

These essays were written at a time of heightened "black" consciousness in the Caribbean, and need to be read against the Black Power movement in Trinidad in particular, as they are sites in which Walcott responds to the political climate he was living in and engages with the larger issues of race and identity being

¹ George Lamming, Pleasures of Exile (London: Allison and Busby, 1984), p.24.

² Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History," Is Massa Day Dead? ed. Orde Coombs (New York: Anchor Press and Doubleday, 1974), pp.1-27. Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

³ Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), pp.3-40. Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

⁴ Derek Walcott, "The Figure of Crusoe," unpublished lecture given at the University College of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 1965. Pagination hereafter will be from the manuscript.

⁵ Derek Walcott, "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?," Journal of American Studies and World Affairs 16, no.1, February 1974, pp.3-13. Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

debated at the time.

Given the region's colonial history, stratifications of race and class produced in Trinidad, a society in which capital and business were mainly in the hands of those who happened to be white, while black people formed the majority of the blue collar working groups. Trinidad's economy, heavily dependent on the sugar, oil and tourist industries were, despite Independence which was gained on 31st August 1962, almost wholly in the hands of American and European corporations, perpetuating a system of absentee ownership which smacked of the plantation days. The country remained a producer of primary goods, and whatever "industries" introduced as foreign ventures were, as James Millette points out in his essay "The Black Revolution in the Caribbean", retrogressive rather than progressive. For cars in kit form and socks without heels were imported to be assembled and packaged in Trinidad, projects which, adding just 1% to the value, had no significant impact on the country's economy. Such ventures, together with the indiscriminate introduction of machinery merely created, as Millette points out, jobs in the industrial capitals of the world at the expense of unemployment at home.⁶

⁶ See James Millette, "The Black Revolution in the Caribbean," Is Massa Day Dead? ed. Orde Coombs (New York: Anchor & Doubleday, 1974), pp.47-66. Essays such as this, Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "Timehri" (pp.29-44) and Clive Thomas's "Black Exploitation in the Caribbean" (pp.121-40) in Is Massa Day Dead? provide a useful backdrop to "The Muse of History".

With rising unemployment spread political agitation by black Trinidadians for whom the promises voiced by politicians at Independence remained unfulfilled. This agitation was articulated above all on racial lines. John La Guerre stated:

If the urban proletariat was largely Black, the peasantry largely East Indian and the Whites well-off, then the conclusion that the Whites were rich and the Black poor, were self-evident truths. Class warfare accordingly easily glided into race warfare and racial epithets substituted for the class lexicon. In similar fashion the emergence of political parties, the economic division of labour, and the correspondence between cultural activities and race were interpreted in terms of frozen categories rather than seen as accidents of history.⁷

In the struggle against capitalist structures which, for those like Stokely Carmichael of the Black Power Movement were interchangeable with white people - Carmichael stated, "What we're talking about around the U.S. today, and I believe around the Third World, is the system of international white supremacy coupled with international capitalism⁸ - was a rehabilitation of "blackness" meant to give the black person, denigrated throughout colonial history and now acted upon by multinational corporations, a sense of wholeness which would mobilize him/her to struggle against a world dominated by white power groups.

⁷ John La Guerre, "Race Relations in Trinidad and Tobago," Trinidad and Tobago: The Independence Experience 1962-1987 ed. Selwyn Ryan (St. Augustine: Institute of Social and Economic Research, UCWI, 1988), p.198.

⁸ Stokely Carmichael, "Black Power," The Dialectics of Liberation ed. David Cooper (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.150.

These articulations excluded however all other ethnic groups, ignoring therefore the complex racial situation within the Caribbean itself, and marginalizing if not positively discriminating against other races.⁹ Thus on a tour of Guyana in 1971 Stokely Carmichael declared, "Black Power means just what it says: Power to black people. Not for Indians, not for Chinese but black people alone".¹⁰

In the construction and strategic use of a "black" identity, Africa was focused on as a continent which, having gained political Independence, provided for the Black Power leadership and other politicians, tangible models of the possibilities for black political power and a black internationale. Culturally too it was a time when West Indian writers like George Lamming and Edward Brathwaite looked to Africa as an alternative cultural source that could be returned to and claimed as their own, Africa being their ancestral homeland. It is against such an emphasis on the "black" self, which, in its crudest articulations rejected

⁹ For a discussion of the racial animosity between those of African descent and the East Indians in Trinidad, see John La Guerre, "Race Relations in Trinidad and Tobago".

¹⁰ Quoted in Joseph Manyoni, "Emergence of Black Power," The Stability of the Caribbean ed. Robert Moss (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1973), p.112. It must be noted however that there were more sophisticated uses of the term "black". Walter Rodney for instance used it to denote a politically oppressed group and stated, "The West Indian situation is complicated by factors such as the variety of racial types and racial mixtures and by the process of class formation...Nevertheless, we can talk of the mass of the West Indian population as being black - either African or Indian." Rodney excluded however the Chinese and the Syrians living in the Caribbean. Manyoni, p.112.

all that was white and derived from the coloniser's tradition, and the cultural and political agendas of writers to return to Africa and through that return, give due recognition to the African traditions within the Caribbean itself, that Walcott wrote "The Muse of History", negotiating his **own** racial and cultural identity.

Keenly aware of the traumas of West Indian history Walcott asks in "Muse", "Who in the New World does not have a horror of the past, whether his ancestor was torturer or victim? Who, in the depth of consciousness, is not silently screaming for pardon or for revenge?" (Muse, p.4) For the history of the region has been a violent one, marred by genocide, slavery and indenture, and characterized by greed which fuelled the European coloniser's scramble for wealth in the area. Either way, Walcott is himself implicated in both the need for revenge and remorse as descendant of exploited African slave and conquering European coloniser, marginalized black colonial and privileged intellectual educated in the coloniser's language. Aware of the contradictions he inhabits as a colonial, "The Muse of History" and much of Walcott's work are passionate arguments against all absolute positions, for to exact revenge from the coloniser or express remorse for being complicitous in the colonial enterprise is for the hybrid West Indian, (and here Walcott specifically addresses a middle-class audience, stating that the question of identity is not one which concerns the peasant, "the inevitably rooted man" (Muse, p.21)), an enterprise which necessarily denies

and mitigates against a part of him/herself.

For Walcott such desire for revenge or remorse emanates from a reading of the past in terms of a history which denies "mythic" possibilities. History is a selective fiction, "a literature without morality" in the playwright's words, in which "the ego of the race is indissoluble and...everything depends on whether we write this fiction through the memory of hero or of victim." (Muse, p.2) History can never be a "true" account of what actually took place, being an interpretation of events, and those who take such history seriously Walcott warns, fall into dangerous traps. Much of the energy of "Muse", bordering on vitriol would in fact be directed against those who, in Walcott's view, choose to see history in this way, particularly through the eyes of the victim which, in the context of the Caribbean, is as the descendant of the African slave. And although no names are named in the essay, it is reasonable to assume that Edward Kamau Brathwaite was a key target in this attack, although not the only one.¹¹

Brathwaite's The Arrivants¹² was published in 1973, a year before "Muse". It is a work in which, inspired by his own sojourn

¹¹ Reviewing O.R.Dathorne's The Scholar Man (1963) Walcott attacked Dathorne scathingly for "Playing the old race game" in this work. See Walcott "Playing the Old Race Game," Trinidad Sunday Guardian, 29th July, 1964. p.21

¹² Edward Kamau Brathwaite, The Arrivants (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

in Ghana where he worked as an education officer from 1954-62, and artists like Aubrey Williams and writers like Lamming and Wilson Harris who, looking for a sense of cultural wholeness in keeping with the times began celebrating what indigenous traditions survived on the South American mainland or are practised in Africa, Brathwaite looks to Africa as an alternative cultural fount to that of the European metropolis. The Arrivants encompasses then a project which Walcott was dismissive of for reasons which will be discussed shortly, and served therefore to place Brathwaite at the opposite end to Walcott in the debate on West Indian identity.

The Arrivants, a trilogy comprising "Rights of Passage", "Masks" and "Islands", traces the diaspora which brought Africans to the "New World", their alienation and underprivilege there to the workings of colonial history. In the poem "The Emigrants" which echoes Lamming's novel of that name, the contemporary West Indians who leave their island homes for greener pastures and work in metropolitan capitals are "New World mariners/ Columbus coursing Kaffirs". (Arrivants, p.52) The very naming of Columbus, inviting associations of colonial history, not only forces acknowledgement of the **inevitability** of these journeys the emigrants undertake fleeing from poverty, but also comments ironically on journeys which will not bring the West Indians riches unlike those the Europeans embarked on, crossing the sea to a Caribbean which yielded great wealth. Again in "Spades", offensive images of black identity mediated in and through the

coloniser's literary texts, Hollywood films and minstrel shows are acknowledged as agents of oppression, imprisoning the black wo/man in an unjust history. Brathwaite is close to this history and throughout The Arrivants identifies strongly with the underprivileged black West Indian. Emphasizing the sense of alienation governing West Indian life, the poets look to the African continent as the West Indian's ancestral home, an alternative cultural fount which has the capacity to welcome and give the West Indian a sense of cohesion and rootedness. Thus there is a pun in the title of "Rights of Passage" - which is both a rite, a ritual experience by which the West Indian seeks and gains self-awareness, as well as the **right** of such a return journey to a continent from which s/he was forced out in the first place.

In "~~The~~ Muse of History" Walcott emphatically rejects such a "back to Africa" doctrine, finding it flawed and disingenuous in its dismissal of the coloniser's tradition, for as Brathwaite implies in a poem like "Bosompra", a return to the African source means a rejection of the colonial language and therefore the culture and values it carries:

I who have pointed my face
to the ships, the wind's anger,
today have returned, eat-

ing time like a mud-
fish; who was lost,
tossed among strangers,

waves' white con-
sonants, have returned
where the stones

give lips to the water:

asuo meresen

asuo meresen

asuo meresen... (Arrivants, pp.136-137.)

To begin with, Walcott questions the very images of the African homeland portrayed, accusing writers and politicians who took refuge in and exploited the "Black is Beautiful" slogan for their own political ends at the time, of presenting a romanticized African utopia that never existed. He declared, "The West Indian mind historically hung over, exhausted, prefers to take its revenge in nostalgia, to narrow its eyelids in a schizophrenic day-dream of an Eden that existed before its exile." (Twilight, pp.19-20.) Walcott's sarcasm here is a little too forced for despite the acknowledgement of a people under pressure, he is ultimately unsympathetic to the fact that it was, and is, in response to the severity of the alienation and hardship suffered in the Caribbean that from the time of their exile African slaves through to those like Marcus Garvey and the Rastafari have looked on Africa with nostalgia as a place which is wholesome and welcoming. Or for that matter that it is in response to a crisis of identity and sense of inhabiting a world which lacks cohesion, that writers like Lamming and Brathwaite look to Africa and its cultural traditions as encompassing a heritage they are heirs to, and which would bring them to an understanding, as Brathwaite writes in "Timehri", "of community,

of cultural wholeness".¹³

There is certainly in The Arrivants a romanticizing of the African continent. In poems like "Prelude" (of "Masks"), "Sunsum" and "New World A-Coming", Brathwaite repeatedly emphasizes the cruelty and violence of the European conqueror, questioning his very civilization through juxtaposing images of the grandeur of ancient African kingdoms, their rooted traditions and hospitality. In "New World A-Coming" the poet laments the arrival of the slaves in the Caribbean, forcing acknowledgement of the inhumanity of the white slave trader, ignoring or refusing however to also name the African ancestor's complicity in that horrific trade. This was the type of poetry then that Walcott sarcastically referred to as "a kind of musical accompaniment to certain theses, (which) as history...is forced to exclude certain contradictions, for history cannot be ambiguously recorded." (Muse, p.22) If confronted honestly, West Indian history was for Walcott testimony to the complicity of **both** black and white ancestors in the chain of events which brought Africans to the "New World", so that in reality, "there is no one left on whom we can exact revenge." (Twilight, p.11)

Walcott's reaction to such poetry, the Black Power movement and the Africanization of the Caribbean, is deeply entrenched in his own class and cultural positions. Evident in "Muse",

¹³ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "Timehri," Is Massa Day Dead, p.33.

interviews given and articles written at the time, is a natural anxiety on his part as a mulatto and one who admires European cultural traditions and does not intend denying it, about the racism he saw at the matrices of these Black Power and Back to Africa movements permeating the Trinidadian society he was living in at the time. In an interview with Raoul Patin the playwright stated for instance, "Just as before, the imperialist value that anything white was worthwhile was something one reacted to, one would have to react extremely violently to the idea that anything black was valid for Trinidad because look at who it's leaving out!"¹⁴

For sensitive to his own cultural and religious marginalization in St. Lucia, Walcott has always been attentive to minority issues and, as essays like "Muse" and "Twilight" indicate, a conscious spokesman for minority rights. Subscribing to the dictate that "The highest expression of culture is a total acceptance of every human being"¹⁵, he stated in "A Colonial's Eye-View of the Empire" that what disturbed him about living in the U.S.A. was having to continually "reduce one's spirit to what the social habits and social judgments of its own people are" which, according to Walcott, "made you lower your view of the civilization" for being such a blatant betrayal of the spirit of

¹⁴ Derek Walcott, "Any Revolution Based on Race is Suicidal," Caribbean Contact 1 no.8, August 1973, p.14.

¹⁵ Derek Walcott, "A Colonial's Eye-View of the Empire," Triquarterly 65, Winter 1986. p.79.

the "New World".¹⁶ It isn't surprising then, that Walcott was critical of the racial and cultural exclusivity being bandied around in Trinidad by certain politicians and public figures at the time. He declared in "Muse", that those West Indians ("one group of anatomists" as he called them) who claim that tradition "is wholly African and that its responses are alerted through the nostalgia of one race...must allow the Asian and the Mediterranean the same fiction". (Muse, pp.17-8)

A doctrine that denied other cultures expression was not only politically inimical but in the context of the Caribbean, one that also ignored the complexity of its societies which were syncretic and hybrid. It is no accident that Caribbean writers, as products of such cultural mixing, have always celebrated cosmopolitanism as a distinct feature of the Caribbean, created by a history which brought to the region people of many races and cultures. George Lamming stated of the Caribbean, "the world met here"¹⁷, and Roberto Fernando Ratemar recognized that the Americas were unique in this respect in the entire planet, being "a vast zone for which mestizaje (racial intermingling) is not an accident, but rather the essence, the central line".¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., p.76-7.

¹⁷ George Lamming, Pleasures of Exile, p.36.

¹⁸ Roberto Fernando Ratemar, "Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America," trns.Lynn Garafola, David Arthur McMurray and Robert Marquez, Massachusetts Review 15, Winter-Spring 1974. p.9.

For Walcott then, to extol the virtues of "blackness" and impose an Africanization of the West Indies was to create a hegemonic black group which blurred and overpowered other ethnic and cultural identities which, in a truly democratic Caribbean would have equal validity. To deny the traditions of the coloniser in emphasizing the "black" self was moreover, to deny the real history which had written the Caribbean and repudiate a part of one's identity. Walcott argued, citing the early poetry of the Guadeloupian St. John Perse and the Martiniquian Aimé Césaire's "Return to my Native Land", the one white, privileged and close to classical French, the other black, poor and close to the tone of Martiniquian Creole, that taken **together** they constituted the sensibility and range of the "New World" man. (Muse, pp.16-7)

In fighting his corner however, Walcott has been trapped into denying the very multiculturalism he argued for when he opposed the essentialism of the Black Power and Back to Africa doctrines. For at the expense of defending the importance of European traditions in West Indian societies, there is in "Muse", "Twilight" and, as will be shown, much of Walcott's work, a dismissal of the African traditions prevalent in the Caribbean writers like Brathwaite and Lamming constantly sought to give recognition to. On returning to the West Indies from Ghana in 1962 Brathwaite found that "it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean."¹⁹ Of course, uncritical remarks such as this, which

¹⁹ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "Timehri", p.34.

ignore the fact that cultures and cultural practices are not static, and that those which travelled to the Caribbean were inevitably transformed in the new landscape and political environment, played straight into Walcott's hands. The playwright was able to comment patronizingly, "The African revival is escape to another dignity, but one understands the glamour of its simplifications." (Twilight, p.9.)

But as has been shown in varying degrees and with different emphases by many scholars - M.J. and F.S. Herskovits in Trinidad Village (1947), G.L.Coulthard in Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature (1962), Errol Hill in The Trinidad Carnival (1972), Maureen Warner Lewis in "The African Impact on Language and Literature in the English-Speaking Caribbean" (1979), Brathwaite in Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica (1981), Kole Omotoso in The Theatrical into Theatre (1982) and Morgan Dalphinis in "The African Presence, Similarities between West Indian Creole and African Oral Literature" (1985) to name but a few, there are in the Caribbean, traditions of folk art, language, religious and harvest rituals which have their roots in the histories and cultures of the native peoples of South America, Africa and India. Brathwaite draws attention for instance in Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica, to common elements in practices and rituals observed at births and deaths, musical instruments, entertainments and dress of the Jamaican slaves and the people

of West Africa.²⁰ Maureen Warner Lewis describes the continuing influence in the Caribbean of West African tribal languages such as Hausa, Fon, Twi and Yoruba, and explains that the slaves brought to the Caribbean between 1825-1890 being mostly victims of the Yoruba civil wars, there is in countries like Brazil and Cuba a strong influence of Yoruba language and religion in particular.²¹ And as Errol Hill pointed out studying the Trinidad carnival, the calypso, which had, by the beginning of the 20th Century become an established part of Carnival, has its roots in African traditions and rhythms, the word "calypso" itself derived from the Hausa term "kaiso", meaning "Bravo" - an expression of approval and encouragement.²² The work of all these scholars point to the fact then that far from being suppressed or irrelevant, these traditions prevail strongly enough in the Caribbean to provide the basis for a distinct West Indian culture. Many scholars sought, and seek, due recognition therefore for these cultural legacies which have survived. Errol Hill's book on the Trinidad Carnival is subtitled "Mandate for a National Theatre" for instance, and Hill himself organized the Dimanche Gras shows in 1963 and 1964 which sought to make out of the Carnival an organized theatre experience.

²⁰ See Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica (London & Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1981)

²¹ Maureen Warner Lewis, "The African Impact on Language and Literature in the English-Speaking Caribbean," Africa and the Caribbean: The Legacies of a Link ed. Margaret E. Graham and Frank W. Knight (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1979), pp.101-23.

²² Errol Hill, The Trinidad Carnival (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1972)

Walcott is however dismissive in his essays of these links with African rituals, religions and languages, and of the view that they are manifestations of a merely pseudo culture exploiting market forces. He stated in "Twilight", "So now we are entering the "African" phase with our pathetic African carvings, poems and costumes, and our art objects are not sacred vessels placed on altars but goods placed on shelves for the tourist. The romantic darkness which they celebrate is thus another treachery, this time perpetuated by the intellectual. The result is not one's own thing but another minstrel show." (Twilight, p.8) To prove that the African heritage was no longer a living force but one rehabilitated and celebrated for political and economic ends, Walcott went on to describe how when the Trinidad Theatre Company performed Soyinka's The Road in 1965, the company "tried, in the words of his Professor, to "hold the god captive," but that "for us Afro-Christians, the naming of the god estranged him. Ogun was an exotic for us, not a force."

(Twilight, p.8)

The playwright implies here that anyone employing African myths or rituals and invoking the gods ends up, if s/he fails to be truly possessed by them, merely sentimentalizing or blaspheming the very traditions and gods s/he invokes. This was in Walcott's view, what happened in the case of the Trinidadian actors whose different West Indian cultural experience prevented them from believing wholly in Ogun. In response to this Victor Questel

asked, "Why does the failure of Walcott's actors to experience Ogun as a tribal African might, strike Walcott as a dramatic failure? Does not the appearance of Ogun in a play immediately change him from the Ogun of real ritual into the Ogun of art?"²³

Questel need not have made such a marked distinction between "real ritual" and "art", because in Soyinka's plays, Ogun operates as a symbol on multiple levels, and in a play like The Road in particular, in which the power of ritual which reinforces the authority of the god pervades, Ogun exists as both god of ritual and creativity (art) who has knowledge of the road, life and death. Walcott himself repeatedly referred to The Road moreover as a masterpiece²⁴, so that the playwright's remark in Twilight refers not to an inherent weakness in Soyinka's play, but an inability on the part of his actors to be possessed by the god. Rooted in a different cultural experience, Walcott and his actors "could (only) pretend to enter (the god's) power", but as the playwright stated, "he would never possess us, for our invocations were not prayers but devices." (Twilight, p.8)

Questel is right however to point out that the failure of

²³ Victor Questel, "Derek Walcott: Contradiction and Resolution," Ph.D Thesis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 1979. p.600.

²⁴ See Derek Walcott, "Reflections Before and After Carnival", Interview with Sharon Ciccarelli, Charts of Saints (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1979), p.308. Walcott also praised The Road in an interview with me in August 1989.

Walcott's company to grasp the immediacy and power of Ogun through ritual is not so much "their failure to understand an **African** experience but to understand the living roots of their own West Indian experience, where the terror and ecstasy of possession are still a basic part of folk religion and imagination."²⁵ As Brathwaite points out in Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica, worship in voodoo, shango, santeria, kumina etc. which takes place in the Caribbean is not passive but active, involving the community in song and dance and "culminating in the phenomenon of possession: in which the god/power is attracted (grounded) into the community to complete the circle" (and) "one or several of the community who are possessed by the god are psycho-physically transformed into the attributes of that god."²⁶ There is mystery in such possession, and terror in Obeah, the Papa Diable masquerade in which Papa Diable covers those who taunt him with tar and enacts a ritual of death and revival²⁷, and, by Walcott's own admission, in the stories he and his brother heard from their grand-aunt Sidone Wardrope which frightened them, so that as Walcott describes,

The cloven hoof, the hairy paw
despite the passionate, pragmatic
Methodism of my infancy,
crawled through the thicket of my hair,
till sometimes the skin prickled
even in sunshine at "negromancy";

²⁵ Victor Questel, "Derek Walcott: Contradiction and Resolution," p.600. My emphasis.

²⁶ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica, p.16.

²⁷ Kole Omotoso, The Theatrical into Theatre (London: New Beacon, 1982), pp.33-4.

(Another Life in Collected Poems, p.166)

The above quotation from Another Life indicates that the young Walcott, like Soyinka, found this world of charm and black magic sinister and frightening. Growing up immersed in western and Christian cultural practices Walcott was however far more alienated than Soyinka, who found life at Isara thrilling and exciting at least, from this Other life of the islands, an onlooker and not a participant. His dismissal of the influence of such links with African life in "Muse" and "Twilight", reducing them to "a catalogue of forgotten gods, to midden fragments, artifacts, and the unfinished phrases of a dead speech" (Muse, p.8), and those therefore which have no significant impact and future in the Caribbean, emanates then from his personal class and cultural experience, the basis from which he then proceeds to make generalizations about the entire Caribbean.

In re-articulating a "West Indian" identity, a far more constructive approach lay for Walcott in the refusal to let a positivist sense of history govern responses which led, as he took pains to show, to recrimination and despair, nostalgia, essentialism and racial dogma. The way forward he believed was for the West Indian to see that "In the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid, but because it has never mattered" and that "what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races,

what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention."²⁸

Out of the frequently proclaimed sense of a "loss" of history and absence of ruins in the Caribbean then, Walcott would repeatedly endorse in works from "Muse" through to Dream on Monkey Mountain this "loss" as a positive if not essential force. For if what was necessary was an imagination which would for instance regard the arrival of the African ancestor in the Caribbean not as an end of history but a beginning (Muse,p.6), and name in an Adamic enterprise the new landscape and the history of survival in the "New World" - in other words, the "re-creation of the entire order, from religion to the simplest domestic rituals" (Muse,p.5) - the West Indian had at first to free him/herself from a stifling "linear" history. This could be achieved according to Walcott only by a "return through a darkness whose terminus is amnesia...a journey back from man to ape" which, in the playwright's words, "Every actor should make...to articulate his origins (although) for those who have been called not men but mimics, the darkness must be total". (Twilight,p.5) It would be a path that would, as Walcott attempted to dramatize in Dream on Monkey Mountain, facilitate, even though it would entail the "horror of rediscovery", the annihilation of "what is known" (Twilight,p.26), one in other words that would provide the West Indian with an opportunity of a fresh beginning.

²⁸ Derek Walcott, "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?," p.6.

Walcott did stress however that this was not to completely ignore the historical processes that have written the Caribbean. In stating that "maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor" (Muse, p.1), or that in the Caribbean there is no nostalgic and simple return to a lost innocence - "the apples of its second Eden have the tartness of experience" he stated (Muse, p.5) - Walcott moves towards acknowledging all the traditions - European, African, Arawak, Carib and therefore the entire baggage of the colonial history that has created what the region is today. But for the playwright, "The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force" (Muse, p.2), so that the revolutionary West Indian is one who, like St. John Perse's hero, "remains the wanderer, the man who moves through the ruins of great civilisations with all his worldly goods by caravan or pack mule, the poet carrying entire cultures in his head, bitter perhaps, but **unencumbered.**" (my emphasis, Muse, p.3)

This contradictory urge towards acknowledging history on the one hand but ignoring its "subliminal whispers", and neither explaining nor forgiving it on the other - for to acknowledge history is surely to be engaged with its issues and thereby encumbered with it - points to a personal and colonial history that brings the mulatto and socially privileged Walcott to crisis and feeds his need to get beyond it, the desire as he

told Raoul Patin, to "purge (himself) of the whole nightmare".²⁹ The Adamic endeavour of naming the Caribbean afresh would then in theory provide Walcott with an opportunity to re-articulate his identity on a clean slate. As he stated, "We would walk, like new Adams, in a **nourishing ignorance** which would name plants and people with a child's belief that the world is its own age." (my emphasis, Twilight, p.6) It would not only alleviate the privileged Walcott's complicity in the "sordid" history of the region which would have to be renounced in order to begin again, but also more importantly, make essential his artistic imagination in the re-writing of history being a Second Adam entails.

For the playwright, the impulse to forget, to go back beyond history, is the pursuit of the "disassociated sensibility" and therefore, the deracinated West Indian the mad Makak in Dream on Monkey Mountain would in particular embody. But recognizing that the need for roots and cohesion are not just preoccupations of the West Indian but modern wo/man as well, he would also bring together in "Muse", Other Leopards by Dennis Williams and Wodwo by Ted Hughes as works in which "there is the displaced, searching psyche of modern man, the reversion of twentieth century man whether in Africa or in Yorkshire to his pre-Adamic beginning, to **pre-history**" adding that it is a "shared contagion of madness (that) exists universally in contemporary poetry". (My emphasis, Muse, p.24) As Kenneth Ramchand points out however, "By

²⁹ Derek Walcott, "We Are Still Being Betrayed," p.16.

the end of Other Leopards for instance the need either for roots or for spiritual transcendence has been correctly established, but the central character has achieved neither...Froad's madness, indeed, is evident in the **impossibility** of what he claims to have done to his body and to be able to do with his consciousness."³⁰

Acknowledged by both writer and critic then is the need for the colonized West Indian to re-articulate identity in a manner which brings cohesion and dignity to his/her experience. It is because of this that the image of Adam becomes particularly important for Walcott as it speaks to him of the possibility of another beginning. And it is this Adamic venture that also prompts the playwright to choose the Robinson Crusoe/Friday story as a more relevant analogy to the West Indian ethos than the Prospero/Caliban narrative most colonial writers have appropriated for their re-articulations of identity. As Walcott stated in his lecture "The Figure of Crusoe", Defoe's hero is an apt symbol for the West Indian for many reasons. Crusoe having been shipwrecked and castaway **without choice** on a Caribbean island is representative of African slaves who were forcibly transplanted onto Caribbean territory. Crusoe's beginnings on the island, stresses Walcott, was just as humble as the slaves - "Crusoe is no lord of magic, duke, prince. He does not possess the island he inhabits. He is alone, he is a

³⁰ Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp.162-3. My emphasis.

craftsman, his beginnings are humble." (Crusoe,p.8) And of utmost importance to Walcott is that Crusoe's island is uninhabited and without language - "a green world, one without metaphors" as he writes in "Crusoe's Journal" (CP,p.93) - so that Crusoe has Adam's task of "giving things their names" and beginning again with what little he can salvage from his ship. It is a task Walcott identifies implicitly with having been, and still being that of those who were transported to the "New World".

For the playwright, Crusoe is not only a role model for the West Indian, but also a particularly apt symbol of the West Indian artist. Engaged in basic survival, but a creative one, he embodies for Walcott the West Indian writer for whom "even the bare necessities/ of style are turned to use,/ like those plain iron tools he salvages/ from shipwreck, hewing a prose/ as odorous as raw wood to the adze" (CP,p.93). For Walcott who has always stressed the importance of craftsmanship, Crusoe the artisan who literally becomes a writer when he inscribes his journal (Crusoe's journal is for Walcott the first West Indian novel (Crusoe,p.7)) provides an inspiring model to emulate. But the playwright's personal identification with Crusoe goes further. Defoe's narrative is for Walcott essentially one of isolation and survival and therefore one which he felt mirrored his own existence as a West Indian writer. As we have seen, a sense of alienation has always been with Walcott, estranged from mainstream St.Lucian life by factors of class, education and

religion. The vitriol with which Walcott attacks in "Muse" and "Twilight" those writers with an alternative vision for the Caribbean, points moreover to the increasing isolation and insecurity he felt amongst these writers, ostracized according to him, by virtue of his refusal to simplify. In being a model of a man who survives despite his isolation and the harsh conditions around him, so that his survival is for Walcott "not purely physical, not a question of the desolation of his environment, but a triumph of will" (Crusoe, p.13), Crusoe provides an encouraging and optimistic example for Walcott to follow.

Walcott's use of the Robinson Crusoe/Friday narrative as a paradigm for the West Indian experience, and his close identification of the figure of Crusoe with that of the West Indian artist and writer is however fraught with ambiguity. The choice of Defoe's story over and above The Tempest is itself significant. At a time when Walcott was urging racial reconciliation, warning against finding in the history of exploitation in the Caribbean fuel for revenge, the Robinson Crusoe story which has far less of the violence that informs The Tempest permits Walcott his thesis of accommodation. For unlike the locale of The Tempest, the island the shipwrecked Crusoe finds himself on is uninhabited - incredibly so for a land so fertile - so that he doesn't have to wrest away territory and authority from indigenous inhabitants as Prospero does. Moreover, although Friday being an Amerindian is more akin to Caliban, his recruitment by Crusoe is, as Peter Hulme points out

in Colonial Encounters³¹, similar to Prospero's enlistment of Ariel into his services. Both Friday and Ariel are rescued from dire fates - Friday from death at the hands of cannibals and Ariel from imprisonment - by the European Crusoe and Prospero respectively and as a result, the predominant characteristic that marks their relationship with their rescuers is one of gratitude.

Ariel is of course more rebellious than the socialized and gentle Friday, so that once again The Tempest, in having both Ariel, and to a far greater extent the anarchic Caliban who forces attention on the despotic nature of Prospero, is a text which is overtly more conflictual, whereas in Robinson Crusoe these tensions are finessed by Defoe. For instance as Hulme's reading of Robinson Crusoe illustrates, the text's attention to detail enables Defoe to negotiate the problematic of the colonial encounter, the empty island facilitates an utopian paradise, and the benevolent commercial world Crusoe encounters, effaces the tensions of competitive commerce. Moreover, by having Friday **volunteer** his services to Crusoe, Defoe circumvents the need for Crusoe to force Friday into servitude and thus name him a "slave". Defoe's text provides Walcott a model in Crusoe then who is castaway, lonely, patriarchal, but in comparison to Prospero, positively benign (made possible of course by the invention of the grateful and childlike Friday), one who although paranoid for

³¹ Peter Hulme, Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797 (London: Methuen, 1986). See Chapter 5.

his safety as a result of his isolation (which elicits sympathy), is shorn of violent intent and therefore utterly appropriatable for Walcott's purposes at the time.

As Peter Hulme convincingly illustrates however, there ^{are} contradictions and fissures in Robinson Crusoe ^{which} show up the ideological tensions of the colonial encounter, the mediation of native identity and the construction of the colonizing, capitalist European self. Crusoe for instance may not call Friday "slave", but has no qualms about teaching the latter to call him "Master" and enforcing a regime in which Friday has little opportunity of expressing a will of his own. And while the name Friday itself serves as a useful mnemonic device providing the servant with a weekly reminder of the gratitude owing to his benefactor, the name itself we may add, serves to totally de-personalize the native inhabitant of the Caribbean.

Walcott is aware of these imbrications in Defoe's narrative and his poems "Crusoe's Island" and "Crusoe's Journal" published in The Castaway and Other Poems (1965) recall with irony Crusoe's patriarchy, missionary zeal and "civilizing" mission. More importantly, he would later brilliantly play upon and invert the roles of Crusoe and Friday in a dynamic questioning and re-writing of Defoe's text in his play Pantomime (1981). But in "The Figure of Crusoe", anxious above all to concentrate on Crusoe the **isolated** castaway, "howling for a human voice", and

Crusoe the craftsman/Adamic (West Indian) artist, Walcott refuses to engage in a reading of the novel which would analyze its colonial discourse except to acknowledge the protean nature of Crusoe who becomes "Adam, Christopher Columbus, God, a missionary, a beachcomber, and his interpreter, Daniel Defoe" simultaneously (Crusoe, p.6), and therefore a figure inextricably implicated in the construction of the contemporary Caribbean.

Such a reading would of course mean an inevitable confrontation with the inequalities of the colonial encounter, the fiction of the Carib cannibal, the patronizing exploitation of Friday, the accumulation of Crusoe's wealth through the slave trade and plantations in Brazil. For although Walcott, following Defoe, protests Crusoe's humble beginnings on the island, he is by no means without the economic and ideological expertise and baggage that knows how to make capital out of cheap labour. But this would be for the playwright to accept the rhetoric of history which he campaigned against so strenuously in his journalistic writings and essays of the period. Moreover, it would throw into question Walcott's **choice** of the European Crusoe as a role model for the Caribbean writer at the exclusion of Friday. It is a choice no doubt rooted in language, for Crusoe's language and its attendant cultural baggage is that of Walcott's, although it is a language which, though inspirational to the playwright, serves to alienate him from Friday's progeny as well. As Walcott describes in "Crusoe's Island",

Now Friday's progeny,
The brood of Crusoe's slave,

Black little girls in pink
 Organdy, crinolines,
 Walk in their air of glory
 Beside a breaking wave;
 ...
 At dusk, when they return
 For vespers, every dress
 Touched by the sun will burn
 A seraph's, an angel's,
 And nothing I can learn
 From art or loneliness
 Can bless them as the bell's
 Transfiguring tongue can bless.

(CP, p.72)

What *Crusoe* offers Walcott above all however in being "Adam because he is the first inhabitant of a second paradise" (Crusoe, p.6), is the possibility of a fresh beginning. Walcott does not question how and why such a fertile island such as *Crusoe's* is, in Defoe's text, uninhabited except for occasional visits by neighbouring Carib islanders who come to picnic. The absence of ruins and history on this island before the advent of *Crusoe* that Walcott forwards then, is an internalization of what the European coloniser disseminated. But for Walcott, the unoccupied, history-less landscape is one which facilitates his Adamic enterprise. And it is in this respect that his dismissal of the influence of African religious and secular practices on Caribbean art and culture, relegating them to manifestations of a pseudo culture exploiting market forces, his perception that the West Indian's poetic traditions begin only with the arrival of the coloniser (as has been marked, *Crusoe's* journal is for him the first West Indian novel), the adaptation of the colonial language and appropriation of its conceptual tools (Muse, p.13) assume significance. For together

with the dismissal (similar to Roberto Fernandez Ratermar's in "Caliban"), of the cultural expressions of ancient cultures of the Maya, Aztec, Carib and Arawak indigenous to the region, they become part of the apparatus with which the playwright **explains away** both the traditions of the pre-colonial Caribbean, and the traditions of the African cultures in the Caribbean, and constructs for himself an empty space that beckons a Second Adam.

Walcott's appropriation of the figures of Adam and Crusoe indicates not just his complicity in the dispossession of the Caribbean through an internalization of the coloniser's story, but also his yearning for an absence of history, so that in constructing/re-articulating history in an Adamic way, a sense of wholeness can be achieved. That Adam and Crusoe stand at the opposite ends of the spectrum and are in a sense, mixed metaphors, does not matter to the playwright. Adam is the archetypal innocent, engaged in a naming which is awesome, while Crusoe arrives on the Caribbean island of Juan Fernandez (the present day Tobago) with knowledge of the "Old" world which his ship from which he picks the first tools of his salvation represents. In seeking a wholeness that can be achieved only through a romantic innocence however, Walcott chooses to take Defoe's effacement of colonial tensions at face value, and himself constructs for the Caribbean an innocent Adamic landscape shorn of Carib, Arawak and African roots which becomes, for the West Indian artist, a privilege to fill.

This Adamic endeavour not only takes the form of a poetic re-writing of history, the naming with awe of the life, flora and fauna of these tropical islands, but also the creation of a national cultural identity. It is in this regard that Walcott's preoccupation in the 1960s with the formation of a national theatre for the West Indies becomes important. In numerous articles and interviews Walcott repeatedly called for State support for a national theatre and bitterly condemned the indifference with which his project was received.³² He was acutely aware, as we have seen, of his marginalization in the political climate prevalent in Trinidad at that time. In an interview with Therese Mills which echoes "Muse" Walcott stated,

We suffer from a historical view of the past. In the ex-British colonies, because we think of history as a formula we have been too tired to create or to invent a political state which is related to the culture.

If there is no culture in the West Indies there is no such thing as West Indian politics.

But we know that there is a culture... This culture has no more relationship to Africa than it had to England when it was colonial. But the point is that it has both, and the new romance being propagated, ambiguously enough, both by the State and the radical movement, is a typical fear of reality - a refusal to realise the absurdity or the truth of the West Indian identity which cannot be anatomised in purely racial terms.

...
In the colonial system we were proud to be English. Ten years later we are proud of being African. Between both extremes there is a refusal

³² See Derek Walcott, "Conversation with Derek Walcott," Interview with Therese Mills, Trinidad Sunday Guardian, 20th June, 1971, pages 10 & 17; "Any Revolution Based on Race is Suicidal," Caribbean Contact 1, no.8, August 1973. p.16, and "A Self-Interview Raises Questions of Identity," Trinidad Sunday Guardian, 16th October 1966. p.7.

to be Trinidadian or St.Lucian.³³

This then is the Walcott who stated in "Meanings" "I am a kind of split writer: I have one tradition inside me going in one way, and another tradition going another. The mimetic, narrative, and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other"³⁴ As has been marked, syncretism does not mean however a free-floating hybridity. Walcott may attempt to fuse elements from both European and African traditions he is heir to, but as will be shown in my discussion of Ti-Jean and His Brothers in Chapter 7 for instance, there is always one tradition dominating the other. Given the fact that Walcott admires the formalism and minimalism of the Kabuki and Noh theatres, and is himself a disciplined craftsman - in "The Schooner Flight", the poet's alter-ego Shabine declares "when I write/ this poem, each phrase go be soaked in salt;/ I go draw a knot every line as tight/ as ropes in this rigging" (CP,p.347) - there is disapproval on Walcott's part then, of what he sees as the exaggeration and indiscipline of folk art in the Caribbean, manifest for him in its worst characteristics in Carnival which he called "a noise that feared everything." (Twilight,p.25) Proof of this comes in the Prologue of Drums and Colours when Ram, Pompey, Yette, Yu and Mano, the racial representatives of the Caribbean, hijack a road march which is part of Carnival, appropriate its costumes and set

³³ Derek Walcott, Interview with Therese Mills, p.10.

³⁴ Derek Walcott, "Meanings," p.48.

about creating a pageant of West Indian history declaring that "This confusion going change to a serious play."³⁵ And against the recommendations of those like Errol Hill who called for Carnival to be promoted to the status of national theatre, Walcott railed in "Twilight" about what he saw as the lack of form, dramatic sequence and poetry in Carnival, despite the presence of skits and calypso dramas which had made their re-appearance in Carnival by 1933, and the strong narrative structures of the calypsos themselves.³⁶ The playwright stated, "Carnival was as meaningless in art as the art of the actor confined to mimicry. And now the intellectual courting and fearing the mass, found values in it that they had formerly despised. They apotheosised the folk form, insisting that calypsos were poems." (Twilight, pp.34-5)

It isn't surprising then that Walcott found Government policy to popularize and rehabilitate folk art a misdirected venture.³⁷ He told Therese Mills, "The mass programme of folk culture is destroying both its validity and its freshness ... They create the illusion in thousands of people that they are performers without the discipline required of any theatrical

³⁵ Derek Walcott, "Drums and Colours," p.3. Kole Omotoso also makes this point in The Theatrical into Theatre, p.141.

³⁶ See Errol Hill, The Trinidad Carnival, Chapter 8 on "Calypso Drama".

³⁷ Apart from local projects like the "Better Village" programme in Trinidad on which Walcott was an uneasy and at times frustrated committee member, (see Interview with Therese Mills, p.10), there were also programmes like Carifesta which was sponsored in Guyana in 1972 and held in islands such as Jamaica, Cuba and Barbados.

performance" and added that "State subsidy should be on the individual genius more than on the mass programme" because without a "cultural policy towards the individual artist...there can be no cultural policy towards the mass."³⁸

Walcott's personal stake in such a stance is obvious. For one thing, the State's patronage of popular culture was alarming for a Walcott who belonged to a cultural minority. In the interview with Therese Mills he stated that "One of the most dangerous signs of cultural fascism is the assimilation of folk culture in the policy of the State. This goes under the image of national identity..."³⁹ For the adoption of the cultural expressions of a particular group by the State would legitimize and enshrine only those expressions at the exclusion of others, and this was clearly unacceptable to Walcott who realized not just the dangers of such a policy but also the fact that he had most to lose. For as the director of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop he had for years sought, as he chronicles in "Twilight", to create a versatile, disciplined and mature theatre company, and felt aggrieved that the energies of his company and the contribution it was making to West Indian culture were being ignored by the establishment.⁴⁰ It is not difficult however, to

³⁸ Derek Walcott, Interview with Therese Mills, p.10.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Walcott had moreover resisted, as he repeatedly stressed, self-exile unlike writers like Lamming, Selvon and Naipaul, and decided to stay behind and write from within the West Indies itself, although as he commented "It is tougher to stay at home and suffer all the abrasions." He would have been particularly

see why Walcott who was, as we have seen, standing firm against the tide of the times, was passed by. As Kole Omotoso points out in The Theatrical into Theatre, "The story of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop is that of transplanting theatre as it is understood in the West into the Caribbean" and that "Its failure, in spite of what looks like a heroic effort, must be seen in the fact that it also ignores some important aspects of the expression of the play-consciousness of the Caribbean."⁴¹

Walcott's own attitude towards the folk, and aspects of its culture are evidence of this. In "Twilight" he stated, "The theatre was about us, in the streets, at lampfall in the kitchen doorway, but nothing was solemnised into cultural significance." (Twilight, p.7) It is true that the life and culture of the essentially poor West Indian folk was, when Walcott was growing up, either absent from literary texts or when present, unsympathetically recorded, even distorted. The Adamic effort in works like Sea at Dauphin and Ti-Jean and His Brothers sought for instance to redress this. But it is also true that Walcott, schooled in European traditions, was dismissive of this theatre and ritual of the streets for falling short of art. Of Carnival for instance he stated,

aggrieved then that his sacrifice and the energy with which he founded and developed the Trinidad Theatre Workshop were not tangibly appreciated by the Trinidad Government which refused to sponsor his idea of a National Theatre. See "A Self-Interview Raises Questions of Identity," Trinidad Sunday Guardian, 16th October, 1966.p.7.

⁴¹ Kole Omotoso, The Theatrical into Theatre, p.52.

The bands are designed to be on the move, to avoid giving the impression of being art, while using all its skills, dance, colour, belief. But all of these elements combine to make the curious force of Carnival its great **almostness**, its **near**-theatre from the bands, its **near**-sculpture from its craftsman. It will remain always as close as that, but no one should look on Carnival as art. It is an expression of a people with a fantastic, original genius for the theatrical, who may never produce great theatre.⁴²

Walcott saw his duty then as one which was "to transform the theatrical into theatre." (Twilight, p.34) In doing so, he was essentially categorizing the oral traditions, religious rituals and festivals - the theatre of the St. Lucian and Trinidadian majority - as merely theatrical, elements in a "people's crude aesthetic which (the creative writer) refined and orchestrated". (Twilight, p.35)

It is such a dismissal of popular culture that we see in his attitude towards Caribbean languages as well. For although he heralded Césaire's command of Martiniquian Creole in "Return to my Native Land" as an artistic achievement, and insisted that its tone was a valid part of the Caribbean heritage, he refused to give the Creole languages of the Caribbean equal status with that of the coloniser's. Walcott stated, "The West Indian poet is faced with a language which he hears but cannot write because there are no symbols for such a language and because the closer he brings hand and word to the precise inflections of the inner

⁴² Quoted in Gordon Rohlehr, "The Problem of the Problem of Form: The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-Switching in West Indian Literature," Caribbean Quarterly 31, no.1, March 1985, p.28. My emphases.

language and to the subtlest accuracies of his ear, the more chaotic his symbols will appear on the page, the smaller the regional dialect, the more eccentric his representation of it will become, so his function remains the old one of being filter and purifier, never losing the tone and strength of the common speech as he uses the hieroglyphs, symbols, or alphabet of the official one." (Muse, p.13) It is a statement which locates Walcott as one who, admiring standard English as set down by the elite institutions of the metropolis and its colonial centres, polices the language.

Keeping out the Creole languages for what he sees are their limitations, their inability in his view to express (implying therefore their grasp) of abstract ideas, Walcott stated in "Muse", that despite its artistic evocation of the colloquial, "the great poem of Césaire's could not be written in a French Creole dialect because there are no words for some of its concepts, there are no equivalent nouns for its objects, and because even if these were suddenly found, they could not be visually expressed without the effort of an insane philologist." (Muse, p.15) Speech is normed by writing, and Walcott's attitude is that of one, who, groomed in the "classical" tradition refuses to norm Caribbean speech - in effect, rejecting the language of the majority of his people for being inadequate for literary expression. It isn't surprising then that Walcott resisted the use of "nation" languages by writers like Brathwaite who found the standard English of the

coloniser inadequate to carry the Caribbean experience, and attacked their work for being those deteriorating into "phonetic pain, the groan of suffering, the curse of revenge." (Muse, p.3)

Walcott is however a contradictory writer, and not unaware of this. He stated in "Twilight", "The torment of all self-appointed schizoid saints is that they enact their opposite." (Twilight, p.32) Self-consciously engaged in a debate on issues of identity and history in essays like "Muse" and "Twilight", Walcott makes claims for a classical style and language he himself had long since abandoned for an attempted fusion in his work of all the traditions available to him. For although he begins, in a play like Henri Christophe (1949), with an Elizabethan rhetoric that is misplaced in the work and out of context in the Caribbean, by the time he wrote Sea at Dauphin (1953), twenty one years before the publication of "Muse", he had turned, inspired by the work of J.M.Synge, to the St.Lucian linguistic environment with pride rather than irony. And although in 1964 he would write in an article entitled "Problems of A Period in Transition", "The wound that has been made by dislocation and exile is a profound one from which it will take our artists a long time to recover. The safest solution is still imitation of what is accepted abroad. To attempt anything else is to ignore tradition and history, a psychological quest that could result in serious self-disturbance"⁴³ he had, six years

⁴³ Derek Walcott, "Problems of a Period of Transition," Trinidad Guardian 10th June, 1964. p.5.

before, sought to combine traditions of music, folk-tale and mythology drawn from the African and Anglo-French traditions of St. Lucia in an allegory of colonial history, Ti-Jean and His Brothers.

These contradictions and fissures point then to a Walcott whose deracinated history, cultural orientation and public role in the West Indies brings him to crisis. There is a conflict between the public and private/creative personae. Projected in his journalistic writings and essays is a public persona who takes his role as a West Indian artist seriously but from above, not **within** the popular traditions of the region. His self-conscious agenda here is one of reforming and orchestrating the people's "crude" aesthetic, constructing a "suitable" cultural consciousness. At his best, in works like The Sea at Dauphin and Ti-Jean he celebrates the traditions of the people, theatrically enhancing them with his own creative individuality, rehabilitating the life and culture of the West Indies in a creatively Adamic way.

The preoccupation that remains with Walcott throughout, constantly informing his work then, is the construction of a West Indian identity. But as we have seen, the composition of such an identity is itself fraught with ambiguity and/or essentialist nuances. For there is no such thing as a specific, singular West Indian cultural identity. Walcott recognized this when he objected to those who emphasized a black/African heritage

above all else, for this was an articulation which marginalized and dismissed other cultures and was/is therefore, inimical to a place of cultural mixing such as the Caribbean. But on the other hand, Walcott's own privileging of the European made him deny the African presence in the West Indies, and ignore on the whole the pre-colonial Carib and Arawak heritage which could, as he had shown, celebrating the Carib's defiant stand at Sauteurs in Another Life, be imaginatively recouped. In generalizing moreover on West Indian culture on the basis of his own class and cultural experiences, in projecting his personal history onto a larger canvass, Walcott's re-articulation of both personal and collective identity was inevitably fraught with contradiction.

Walcott wrote of Gregorias and himself in Another Life,

He has his madness
 Mine was our history
 (CP, p.208)

The works of Walcott are sites then in which the playwright takes issue with his colonial history, searching for a path by which this history can become constructive and enabling for the contemporary West Indian. In the following chapters I will discuss the plays Henri Christophe, Sea at Dauphin, Ti-Jean and His Brothers and Dream on Monkey Mountain as works which illustrate the attitudes and arguments rehearsed by Walcott in the essays that have been hitherto discussed.

CHAPTER 6HISTORY AS PRETEXT FOR REVENGE: HENRI CHRISTOPHE

It is with the publication of Henri Christophe in 1950¹ that Walcott dates the commencement of his career as a playwright.² In any case, although he had written many play scripts for performance in St. Lucia while at St. Mary's College, their present unavailability has meant that, as Robert Hamner remarked in his book on Walcott's work, "out of necessity the study of Walcott's career as a dramatist must begin with the play he regards as his first, Henri Christophe."³ Outweighing its chronological importance however is the fact that the play offers significant insights into Walcott's early preoccupations on concerns of national identity, and points to the fact that his stance on issues of history raised in "Muse" and "Twilight" was informing his work twenty years before the publication of these essays.

Walcott stated in "Twilight" that he had turned to the story of the Haitian revolution of 1791-1804 - the only successful slave revolution in history and first successful war

¹ Derek Walcott, Henri Christophe (Bridgetown: Advocate Co., 1950). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

² Derek Walcott, "Meanings," Savacou 2, September 1970, p.45.

³ Robert Hamner, Derek Walcott (Boston: Twayne, 1981), p.52.

of Independence fought by a colony - because "it was something we could look up to. It was all we had" (Twilight, p.14), and its leaders and their citadels "our only noble ruins." (Twilight, p.12) Not only had these deprived slave leaders of the revolution - Toussaint L'Ouverture, Dessalines, Christophe - fought against and been the only people to defeat Napoleon Bonaparte at the time, but also those who had "challenged an ordered universe" in presuming to subvert the very hierarchy orchestrated by a white God who deemed them, black slaves, at the bottom of things. One had to be in awe therefore of these "slaves who by divine right could never be kings" but who "by claiming kingship...abrogated the law of God' nevertheless. (Twilight, p.13) Henri Christophe is the work then of a nineteen year old Walcott already engaged in what he later described as the Adamic endeavour, for it is a play which sets out to **celebrate**, even if it points to the corruption of revolutionary ideals and exposes both a personal and national tragedy, a momentous episode in Caribbean history.

It is a spirit of celebration which also informs Walcott's choice of writing Henri Christophe in a deliberately heightened Elizabethan verse with many echoes of Shakespeare. At the time of writing the play Walcott was, as he stated in "Twilight", "drenched in Elizabethan literature". (Twilight, p.11) It was natural therefore for him to strive to emulate the literary models of Shakespeare and Webster and keep close to the tone of Elizabethan rhetoric and Jacobean drama in his first major play.

But there is more in works like Henri Christophe and In A Green Night (written between 1948 and 1962) which bristle with references to Elizabethan and Metaphysical poetry and a play like Ione (1957) with its echoes of classical Greek tragedy than a mere modelling on European literary traditions. For Walcott, for whom "the greatest poetic literature in English is Elizabethan"⁴, writing Henri Christophe in a consciously Jacobean style was also an attempt at obtaining as well as giving recognition to a local subject **worthy** of such literary treatment.

Henri Christophe, written between April and September 1949 was inspired by a book Walcott's twin brother Roderick had read and recommended, recognizing in the work an exciting subject and a source full of dramatic potential.⁵ That book was Black Majesty by John Womack Vandercook.⁶ A reading of Henri Christophe against Black Majesty, focusing on how close Walcott has kept to his source and the extent he has deviated from it would be useful in providing insights into the playwright's particular artistic and didactic concerns when writing the play, and will therefore inform this chapter.

⁴ Derek Walcott, Interview with me, August 1989.

⁵ Derek Walcott, "Meanings," p.45.

⁶ John Womack Vandercook, Black Majesty: The Life of Christophe, King of Haiti with drawings by Mahlon Blaine (New York & London: Harper and Brothers, 1928). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition. I am grateful to Dunstan St.Omer for this information which, to the best of my knowledge, has not been published before, and to Derek Walcott who later confirmed Black Majesty as the source of Henri Christophe.

In turning to the lives of Dessalines and Christophe as Monarchs and the events they steered during the first two decades of Haiti's Independence, Walcott was engaged above all in drawing from the Haitian experience lessons he felt were immediately relevant to his own society. He was aware as he indicated in "Twilight", of the many parallels between the socio-economic and religious make-up of Haiti and other Caribbean islands including St.Lucia, bound together by common colonial histories and plantation societies in which issues of race and class were tightly interwoven. (Twilight, p.11) And it was the Haitian response to the volatile issue of race that Walcott was particularly interested in exploring in Henri Christophe, realizing even at that age its cruciality in the development of Caribbean society and the forging of its consciousness.

Haiti, known as San Domingo before it was declared an Independent state by Dessalines on 1st January 1804, was considered France's richest colony and was the largest single market for the slave trade. Its colonial history had constructed in Haiti a plantation society in which a virulent class struggle was being nurtured and which erupted on the night of 21st August 1791, leading to thirteen years of war, betrayals, assassinations and counter-revolutions until Independence and beyond, easing only with the declaration of a united Haitian republic with the victory of General Alexander Pétion and the suicide of Henri Christophe in 1820. It was a struggle which was, given the country's colonial history, articulated above all on racial

lines.

The correlatives of class and race in Haiti had left the country with a society dominated by a plantocracy and colonial bureaucracy which was white, a middle class of **petit-blancs** (clerks, grocers etc.) and mulattoes, and a slave working class/peasant population which was black. As C.L.R. James's narrative in Black Jacobins⁷ illustrates, each class/race fought against or formed alliances with each other, depending on who the perceived enemy was. The prize was always the preservation or attainment of economic dominance and attendant political power. Thus white fought against white when the colonists (plantocracy and merchants) began to resent the French bureaucracy for siphoning their profits to the metropolis, and the latter retaliated by fanning the jealousy of the **petit-blancs** (clerks, grocers etc.) for the wealthier ones; all whites united to deny the rights of the mulattoes whom they considered half-caste and a threat because the mulattoes were permitted to own an unlimited amount of land unlike in the British colonies, and whites and mulattoes alike despised and so engaged in a systematic exploitation of their black slaves.

The correspondence of race and class in Haiti meant that the revolutionary struggle of the slave masses against the plantocracy which became, under Dessalines and Christophe a

⁷ C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins (London: Allison & Busby, 1984)

struggle for Independence from colonizing France, was inevitably confused with a struggle against race - "one race's quarrel" as Walcott put it "with another's God." (Twilight, p.13) Thus having defeated Napoleon's army and navy, Dessalines and his colleagues embarked on a campaign of terror against all whites in the country. Legend has it that in response to a drunken Boisrand Tonnerre who stated while formulating the declaration of Independence, "to draw up the Act of Independence, we need the skin of a white man for parchment, his skull for a writing desk, his blood for ink, and a bayonet for a pen", Dessalines had assented vigorously, "That is right, sir...that is my wish. I need white blood."⁸

For Walcott such attitudes were those of people who, responding to their history primarily through the eyes of the victim, sought revenge, and in doing so inflicted a tragedy upon both their nation and themselves. Walcott was not alone in his condemnation of the massacre of the whites by Dessalines, which not only had an adverse effect on the psyche of the Haitian people, terrorizing the whites and brutalizing the blacks, but also severely impaired Haiti's international reputation. C.L.R. James stated in Black Jacobins, "The massacre of the whites was a tragedy; not for the whites. For these old slave-owners, those who burnt a little powder in the arse of a Negro, who buried him alive for insects to eat, who were well treated by Toussaint, and

⁸ Quoted in David Nicholls, From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.36.

who, as soon as they got the chance, began their old cruelties again; for these there is no need to waste one tear or one drop of ink. The tragedy was for the blacks and the mulattoes. It was not policy but revenge, and revenge has no place in politics."⁹ Patrick Bellegarde-Smith pointed out in his article "Haitian Social Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Class Formation and Westernization", that revenge as policy positively undermined the young Haitian nation as the many whites, mulattoes and reactionary blacks who fled Haiti during its turbulent wars and who reinforced the middle-classes wherever they went but particularly in North America, had worked actively against the international recognition of Haitian Independence.¹⁰ Moreover, as Archie Singham stated in "C.L.R. James on the Black Jacobin Revolution in San Domingo - Notes Towards a Theory of Black Politics", Dessalines' mistake of calling for black nationalism when what was needed was the development of black consciousness, was pivotal in the failure of the revolution to sustain itself.¹¹ In Henri Christophe Walcott would therefore dramatize the brutality and futility of seeing in the history of exploitation - in other words, the history of the Caribbean - an excuse for revenge.

⁹ C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins, p.373.

¹⁰ Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, "Haitian Social Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Class Formation and Westernization," Caribbean Studies 20, no.1, March 1980. p.13.

¹¹ Archie Singham, "C.L.R. James on the Black Jacobin Revolution in San Domingo - Notes Towards a Theory of Black Politics," Savacou 1, no.1, June 1970. pp.90-1.

It is to this end that Walcott is in Henri Christophe equally interested, despite its title, in Dessalines (the instigator of anti-white policy), what he made of his rise from the status of slave to king and the impact of his leadership on the young Haitian nation. In this Walcott deviates in emphasis from Vandercook, for Black Majesty, subtitled "The Life of Christophe, King of Haiti" is a sympathetic if patronizing account of the rise of Christophe from runaway slave to hotel stable boy and waiter to ultimately, king of an independent Northern Haiti, and a work in which Dessalines figures little. Where he does figure is at the beginning of Black Majesty when Vandercook orchestrates a scene at the executions of the mulatto Oge and Chevannes who had, on returning to Haiti from a trip to post-Bastille France dared ask for civil right for their people. Toussaint, Dessalines and Christophe - future leaders of the slaves' bid for equality - come together at the execution in an unexpressed but keenly felt solidarity. (BM, pp.24-6) Later, Dessalines figures in the book as Vandercook charts the campaigns of the Haitian slaves against the white plantocracy which was defended by the French military during the revolution.

Although Walcott's emphasis on Dessalines in Henri Christophe is substantially greater than Vandercook's in Black Majesty, the playwright has kept close to Vandercook's portrayal of him - one rife with racial prejudice. Dessalines is described in Black Majesty as sullen and stubborn. Vandercook remarks that "his squat ugliness, his bullet head, his gross black lips, and

his beady, piercing eyes might have demanded an unwilling second glance. Certainly few in all the city were further down the scale of things. He'd brought a good price, but because of his ugliness, an ugliness that gave warning of a stubborn, violent character, the buyers for the White planters had let him go to a negro, a disgrace and an ill-fortune for any slave." (BM, p.13)

Walcott's Dessalines is not far removed from the vile figure Vandercook delineated in Black Majesty. From the beginning of Henri Christophe we are introduced to a ruthless and ambitious character. The arrival in Haiti of the news of Toussaint's death in France with which the play begins, is greeted by Dessalines with apparent indifference, so much so that the messenger remarks, "I expected to move iron men to tears;/ You look as if I had discussed the weather." (HC, p.2) Instead of mourning the loss of Toussaint, the leader's death means for Dessalines who, together with Christophe had betrayed him to the French in the first place, an opportunity to fill the power vacuum created by Toussaint's death before his rival Christophe does, and to this end declares himself Monarch of Haiti.

In reality, Toussaint died a prisoner at Fort-de-Joux on 7th April 1803 and Dessalines crowned himself Emperor in October 1804. By telescoping the two events however Walcott is able to show a Dessalines who is as callous as he is ambitious. It is a portrait others too have constructed. In his play Black

Jacobins, C.L.R. James creates a scene at the end in which the news of Toussaint's death reaches Haiti while its people are celebrating their Independence and freedom from slavery, and Dessalines his royal title. The news does not prevent Dessalines from savouring his moment of glory however. He orders the attendant orchestra to continue playing and forcibly takes his clearly grieving wife Marie-Jeanne on to the floor to continue the dance.¹²

Dessalines is in Walcott's play also a cruel despot who revels in bloodshed and describes the massacre, rape and pillage of white people and their property as "red fun". (HC, p.24) He is described by Alexander Pétion as "a model of horror" (HC, p.20) and Christophe accuses him of having virtually enslaved his people again. (HC, p.18) Pursuing a racial vendetta against the whites, Dessalines has neglected the welfare of the country and when he asks his colleagues at the beginning of the play whether the people have been rebelliously murmuring for bread again, we know that the people are starving and that Haiti's economy is in ruins. (HC, p.2) He is also insolent and without respect for elders like Sylla and Brelle and their offices, and Machiavellian in his plans to fulfil his ambitions, telling Sylla for instance to force from the people petitions against Christophe while simultaneously exacting from them, requests that he be made king. (HC, p.7)

¹² C.L.R. James, "The Black Jacobins," Unpublished manuscript, 1967. p.63.

Walcott attempts in Henri Christophe to examine the causes that led Dessalines to such insolence, ruthlessness and paranoia about both real and imagined enemies. The playwright was aware that given the political and economic problems facing Haiti at the time, firm discipline even bordering on the ruthless was required of its leaders if the situation was to be redressed. Certainly Dessalines had shown the resoluteness of his leadership before in his betrayal of Toussaint. For Toussaint, an admirer of French culture and achievement had remained to the last loyal to France even when, rescinding on a compromise under which Haiti enjoyed internal self-rule but remained a territory of France, Napoleon sent 86 ships with 2200 soldiers aboard to Haiti with instructions to his brother-in-law and commander of the fleet General Leclerc, to reclaim Haiti for France as a colony and restore slavery. Dessalines and Christophe realized that to preserve the freedom the slaves had fought for and won at a terrific price, it was vital to break off ties with an unreliable French administration irrevocably, cunningly using however existing super-power rivalries to their advantage by playing off France, Britain and Spain against each other, but in the main, steering a course of non-alignment. Their betrayal of Toussaint then to facilitate Independence from France was personal foul play but as C.L.R. James noted in Black Jacobins, "it was not treacherous to the revolution".¹³

¹³ C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins, p.346.

With Independence - the period depicted in Henri Christophe - Dessalines had the task of confronting with equal determination, the toll thirteen years of war had taken on Haitian society and the economy. Sylla states, "The peasants have identified liberty with idleness;/ the fallow fields cropless; the old plantations,/Plaine de Nord, Morne Rouge, Quartier Morin,/ Are like grass widows, unweeded, growing thorns/ And bristles, dry seeds on a parching wind."(HC,p.3) It is in response to a situation like this that Dessalines remarks, "We must not talk, delay, malingering/ With words, words, not action"(HC,p.3) and being the strong man declares, "Iron decisions make a Caesar, and a Caesar is what/ This country needs".(HC,p.4) His decisions were however not popular - Sylla describes the peasants as being resentful at being ordered back to work (HC,p.4) - and David Nicholls describes in his book From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti, the steps Dessalines actually took to resuscitate the ailing Haitian economy. Commerce was closely controlled by the government, importation of salt for instance was forbidden to protect local manufacture, and a month before his assassination in October 1806, Dessalines enforced a 10% tax on all imported goods - a measure unpopular and attacked, according to Nicholls, by the group which killed him.¹⁴ Not one to frame "gentle laws" when firmness was required then, Dessalines' economic policy, his military demeanour and rule even in peacetime which, as Nicholls points out, was the only form of authority Dessalines and his

¹⁴ David Nicholls, From Dessalines to Duvalier, p.37.

colleagues knew, not having had previous administrative experience¹⁵, his disregard for the opinion of others and his racial vendetta against the whites all served to alienate him from the masses, isolate him from his colleagues and ultimately, bring about his downfall.

Walcott does not however present Dessalines' ruthlessness as solely a manifestation of his ambition or response to the grave socio-economic problems besetting Haiti. The playwright also suggests that Dessalines' harassment, particularly of the whites, was an unburdening of a grudge on the part of a Dessalines who had been exploited in his life as a slave and who now, in a position of power, seeks vengeance on the collective perpetrators of his past degradation. In the book Black Jacobins C.L.R. James repeatedly refers to Toussaint L'Ouverture who was relatively well looked after by his owner and had the opportunity of self-education as "unwarped". Of Dessalines on the other hand, George Lamming who summarizes James's narrative of the Haitian revolution as the exploited Caliban's reordering of history in The Pleasures of Exile, states that "his will had been shaped by the punishment of the whip."¹⁶ This has resonance in Henri Christophe when Dessalines bares his chest to show the lashes of the whip that lacerated his flesh and cries with bitterness, "for every scar/ Raw on my unforgiving stomach, I'll

¹⁵ Ibid., p.39.

¹⁶ George Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile (London: Allison & Busby, 1984), p.134.

murder children,/ I'll riot" (HC,p.18), and later justifies his actions to Christophe saying "the wounds in my sides/ Were dug with innocent (sic) white hands; a king/ Makes them pay for it". (HC,p.23) It is a memory of slavery which haunts Dessalines even though he has attained the highest office of the land, and engulfs him in bitterness.

Walcott's portrayal is then of a man "trapped" by his personal history, one who, recalling it through the eyes of the victim is consumed by bitterness and hate. And although Walcott conceded later in "Twilight" that "the rage for revenge is hard to exorcise" (Twilight,p.11), his intention in Henri Christophe was to primarily draw attention to the destruction inherent in Dessalines' campaign of revenge, fuelled by a hate which brutalizes, blinds reason and is therefore, ultimately futile. And in warning his Caribbean audience against such a consuming bias Walcott was echoing another West Indian writer, Aimé Césaire, who wrote in Return to my Native Land,

let my heart preserve me from all
 hate
 do not make of me that man of hate for whom I have
 only hate
 I was born of this unique race
 yet knowing my tyrannical love you know
 it is not by hatred of other races that I prosecute
 for
 mine.¹⁷

In order however to concentrate on this racial conflict

¹⁷ Aimé Césaire, Return to my Native Land trns. Anna Bostock and John Berger (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.78.

and expose Dessalines' policy on the volatile subject of race as seriously flawed, Walcott over-simplifies the political problems which confronted the Haitian leadership. It is in this context that the character of Archbishop Brelle becomes important in the play. Cornelle Brelle is described by Vandercook in Black Majesty as "a tall, lean, sallow Frenchman, too dry and cold a man even to sweat with natural ease beneath his cassock, (one who) was ambitious." (BM, p.122) Walcott is rather more generous in his characterization of Brelle than Vandercook, for although portraying his ambition - Brelle does not hide the fact that he would cherish a promotion from Chaplain to Archbishop (HC, p.6) - he is in Henri Christophe, the voice of reason. He cautions Dessalines against the racial vendetta the latter has embarked on, pointing out, "We cannot answer vengeance with vengeance, because/ As far as the eye can warn, the incision instruct,/ The cycle will never end. Blood grows/ Where blood is uprooted..." (HC, p.5), and replies Dessalines who justifies his actions as those dictated by his "conscience, and the memory of a red past" with the retort, "Conscience is the jackass you ride to history on, the mule/ You heap excuses on" (HC, p.6), echoing Walcott's message in "Muse" and "Twilight", that to see in history a pretext for revenge or remorse, is to fall into the very "trap" of history.

In a world full of intrigue and deception in which the Haitian Generals work constantly to undermine each other and Christophe ends up plotting the assassination of Dessalines,

Brelle is also the **only** major character in the play who does not resort to treachery and hypocrisy. He is forthright about his ambitions and courageous in his criticism of both Dessalines and Christophe, warning them against the "The extreme of tyranny" that happens when "the gaoled turn on their gaolers." (HC,p.7) He urges them to abandon their vendettas for peace, complaining, "we are tired/ Of bitter separations between complexions/ That grin above the skeleton" and states "All flesh is similar;/ We have so little time for hooded prayers,/ The eremite mercy, the black regret./ Let us live like servants/ To the inspired intentions history frames to-day". (HC,p.33)

Brelle is however regarded with suspicion and hostility by both Dessalines and Christophe and their Generals, for being white and occupying a powerful office, he symbolizes for them first and foremost, a figure of the old colonial establishment. And there is ample evidence in the text that the suspicions of the Haitian leadership were not unfounded. Walcott indicates that Brelle has a coloniser's disposition. The Archbishop contemptuously dismisses from a position of cultural dominance other cultural tongues as "queer languages" for instance (HC,p.33), and African cults and practices manifest in Haiti as those "growing like an unweeded garden over/ Our pruned labours" (HC,p.4), adamant that only his "church's laws are perfect". (HC,p.6) He subscribes to the common view that the "New" World was founded by Europeans, and is incredulous therefore that Dessalines would dare kill white people for they are, in his view

the founders if nothing else, of his country. (HC, p.5) By discounting the possibility of a successful black leadership for Haiti, Brelle announces his racism as well. He warns Dessalines and Christophe about grasping at kingship not because he doubts their potential, but because as he tells Vastey, "Only God makes kings." (HC, p.35) It is a statement that indicates his belief in a hierarchy in which God is white and any black slave presuming to subvert the given order is guilty of heresy.

It is not surprising then that given his attitudes and his harsh criticism of Dessalines and Christophe, Brelle becomes for the Haitian leaders, a target for hostility. Airing their grievances against a brutal colonial regime, Dessalines, Christophe and their colleagues taunt him throughout the play for belonging to a white race which stands for hypocrisy and treachery. Dessalines accuses the Haitian whites of a false sense of superiority, being really "Wild geese that, adopting a finer climate assume/ The white divinity of the swan" (HC, p.5), of bigotry and meanness in denying the rightful inheritance of the mulattoes, fathered by them in the first place, of exploiting the black slaves for their own economic gain and cynically using religion to glorify their names and consolidate power, building "presbyteries from slavery". (HC, p.5)

It is however the political machinations of the Haitian whites, fighting at all costs to preserve their hegemony, that make the black leaders particularly contemptuous of them. In the

play, Dessalines, Pétion, Sylla and Christophe unite in their condemnation of a white population which resorted to treachery, betraying for instance Toussaint who had treated them with sympathy. Sylla accuses them of being "Traacherous white rags of flesh,/ Dogs under skin, who sold his exile for the judas kiss/ Of comfort" and of being fickle in their loyalty, "Welcoming Toussaint when he routed Rigvad,/ Throwing jewellery and laughter under his horse" but abandoning him when it suited them. (HC, p.5)

In his book The Black Jacobins, C.L.R. James gives a dramatic account of how the Haitian whites, the British, Spanish and French conspired with or against each other in a concerted effort to defeat the revolutionary masses and gain Haiti for themselves - machinations James stresses in his play as well. In Act 2 Scene 1 of the play The Black Jacobins James depicts a scene in which the French General Hedouville informs the mulatto Marie-Jeanne, friend of Dessalines who later becomes his wife, that the French will plot to overthrow Toussaint by supporting Pétion, finding a mulatto regime in Haiti more acceptable than a black one - information Marie-Jeanne promptly passes on to Dessalines.¹⁸ And in Black Majesty itself Vandercook describes a scene in which a French priest invites Dessalines to a sumptuous banquet prepared in his honour at which however he would have been arrested by the French authorities, if a negro maid had not tipped him off, enabling him to make a dramatic exit over the banquet table and out through a window onto his horse. (BM, pp.80-2)

¹⁸ C.L.R. James, "The Black Jacobins," p.26.

It is wholly reasonable therefore that Dessalines and Christophe are suspicious of Brelle, given both this background of political duplicity on the part of the whites and the Archbishop's colonial mentality. Walcott however refuses in Henri Christophe to pursue the coloniser and therefore possible counter-revolutionary agent in Brelle emphatically. Despite his awareness of the situation's potential - Walcott has Vastey exploit Christophe's suspicions of Brelle's allegiances by planting a letter on the Arch-bishop, implicating him in a plot with Pétion against Christophe in scene 5 - the playwright does not go any further to depict the climate of betrayal and counter-revolution instigated by the European colonial powers and Haitian whites which the black Haitian leadership had to constantly contend with. To have done so, despite such examples in Black Majesty and The Black Jacobins, would have been for Walcott, to muddy the waters where his main preoccupations in the play were concerned - those of the corrosive divisions of race, and seeing in the history of the Caribbean, pretexts for revenge.

What Walcott achieves with this effacement of counter-revolutionary threat - an effacement reinforced in the play by the fact that Dessalines' power is threatened only by his own colleagues - black, mulatto, **not** white - is the impression that Dessalines is unnecessarily ruthless in his suspicion and massacre of those of European origin when he has no further need to fear them. It strengthens the portrayal of him as one who is tyrannical and maniacal, particularly as it is nowhere

counterbalanced in the play by the achievements of the revolution Dessalines was at the forefront of, the successful military campaigns or the courage and determination with which these slaves sought a redefinition of themselves and their community which had far reaching effects on the colonial regimes and slave populations all over the region.

What we have in Henri Christophe then is Walcott's own emphasis on the Haitian struggle as primarily a racial one and far less a political and economic tussle by the most deprived sector of Haitian society which happened to be black, against the plantocracy and colonial French bureaucracy which was white. The playwright's comments on Henri Christophe in "Twilight" clearly indicate that his concern in the play was with the Haitian heroes as primarily **black** people who challenged a **white** world for which "they were punished by a white God as masters punished servants for presumption." (My emphasis, Twilight, p.12) In articulating the Haitian struggle as a racial one in this manner however, Walcott was in effect making the same mistake as Dessalines for whom class and politico-economic structures were primarily defined by race.

The consequence of this is the negation by Walcott in Henri Christophe of the real achievements of the revolution. Slavery was abolished, Independence achieved and under Christophe, economic recovery and new education programmes realized. Vandercook had painstakingly described these achievements in

Black Majesty, but Walcott's emphasis, at the expense of celebrating this "inaccessible achieved" which was the intent of the play in the first place, was on the racial consciousness of these leaders which he had little difficulty invalidating, showing both the danger and futility of having such a consciousness inform policy. Concurrently, the instigators of such policy like Dessalines were, in the absence of recognition of their achievements, portrayed as tyrants corrupted by power and hatred, "squalid fascists who chained their own people" (Twilight, p.13) and ultimately unworthy of veneration.

Thus there is an ambivalence on Walcott's part towards these "heroes" of what he called a "meagre" West Indian mythology. On the one hand "they had size, mania, the fire of great heretics" (Twilight, p.13) and for these they were worthy of awe, but on the other, Walcott's denial of the historical importance of the revolution they steered led him to see them only as those who betrayed their people and themselves in abusing their power and harping on a racial theme which was untenable. It is a denial similar to his rejection for instance of the historical **need** for liberating groups such as the Kenyan Mau Mau, even if we concede that the recourse to violence of such groups is brutalizing and in some cases, ineffective. In his poem "A Far Cry From Africa" Walcott stated "brutish necessity wipes its hands/ Upon the napkin of a **dirty** cause" (my emphasis)¹⁹

¹⁹ Derek Walcott, "A Far Cry From Africa," Collected Poems 1948-1984 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), p.17.

Walcott recoils from the slaughter of both the Mau Mau freedom struggle and colonial suppression in equal measure, but this is made possible only by his **extraction** of the violence from its historical context. Consequently he is able to **equate** the Independence struggle and colonial oppression, and construct a congruence from which he then declares his inability to escape -

"I who am **poisoned** with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?"²⁰

Walcott's emphasis in Henri Christophe enabled him however to address his West Indian audience on the corrosive polarization of society into disparate racial groups, hindering the development of the Caribbean towards what Sylla calls "a federation/ Of complexions" (HC, p.31) and Roberto Fernando Ratemar later termed the essence of Caribbean cultures - its **mestizaje** or racial intermingling and cultural mixing. In the case of Haiti, the polarization which had characterized its society in colonial times had been prolonged in quite a brutal manner by Dessalines' campaign of terror against all Haitian whites. Walcott set out in Henri Christophe to dramatize then, the tragedy of such policy both at a national and personal level, by making the post- revolutionary careers of Dessalines and Christophe case studies of those who, permitting their past to dictate the present, wreak havoc in the country. The play carried a plea for the necessity of getting **beyond** history, advice similar to that which Walcott articulated twenty years later in

²⁰ Ibid., p.18. My emphasis.

essays like "The Muse of history" and "Twilight".

That two decades later Walcott was reacting in these essays to the racial rhetoric of the Black Power movement with the same message, points to a history of colonialism and neo-colonialism that has not radically changed the economics or global status of post-colonial countries today. While one recognizes the chauvinism and dangers of such racial rhetoric, it cannot be dismissed out of hand, for it is a response to socio-economic-political structures which cannot be wished away, or remedied through cultural rehabilitation alone, or through an appeal to a "common humanity" for that matter. In the Caribbean context, the fraught colonial past will continue to impinge on the present as long as the underlying material causes for poverty and discrimination remain.

Walcott's focus on Henri Christophe is of a man who, although far more tempered in his judgments and therefore politically mature than Dessalines, permits his past life as a servant to powerful European masters stalk the present. Christophe did not experience the degradations of slavery and consequently did not share Dessalines' hatred of the whites - a factor which contributed, according to C.L.R. James, to his opposition to the massacre of the whites. But having run away from the plantation in Grenada or St. Kitts where his parents

were slaves ²¹, Christophe worked nevertheless until the revolution and his liberation, in menial jobs, first as a servant boy to a French naval officer en route to help the colonists against the British in the American revolution, and then as a stable boy and waiter at the Hotel de la Couronne in Haiti when he was sold to its proprietor, a freed Negro named Coidovic. Although Christophe's life as a slave was not one of hard labour unlike those of his counterparts on the plantations, an incident Vandercook describes in Black Majesty indicates that Christophe too suffered his share of humiliation for being of the wrong race and colour. According to Vandercook, when an argument had started between a rich planter and a military officer over a game of billiards at the inn, Christophe who had been marking their scores, had supported the officer's cause and been slapped in the face for his pains by the planter who was unable to contain his anger at the insolence of the slave waiter. Years later when Christophe was king, he had sought out the planter who had survived despite Dessalines' pogrom of the whites, and reminding him of the incident at the inn, challenged him to a duel in which the planter was killed. (BM, pp.21-2)

The Christophe we come across in Walcott's play is far more

²¹ Vandercook points to some confusion as to Christophe's origins. According to Vandercook, "A Royal Almanac prepared by a courtier and published at the presses of the King's Palace of Sans Souci gives the date of his birth as October 6, 1767, and his birthplace as Grenada...But old men who still live in Haiti, whose grandfathers were numbered among the friends and councillors of the King, say he came from Kitts...which in the king's time still went by its old name of St.Christopher," Black Majesty, p.6.

ambitious and cunning than Vandercook's character. In Henri Christophe this ambition is no secret - Dessalines is himself only too aware of it and Christophe's own soldiers comment that their Commander "Thinks of the day his sun alone shall hang/ In the sky's arena". (HC, p.9) The extent of his ambition to be king is forcefully depicted for us by Walcott in scene 3 of the play, when Christophe plots Dessalines' murder with Pétion (although in Black Majesty Vandercook does not implicate Christophe in Dessalines' death) and then artfully feigns remorse to Dessalines at a time when the latter, weary of 13 years of war and Haitian politics relies on Christophe as a friend the most. Promising Pétion to "hide the snake/ In my pawn's fawning" (HC, p.21) Christophe does just this when face to face with Dessalines. Pretending a change of heart he tells Dessalines of the intended plot against him, and when he has harnessed Dessalines' trust with this, advises his former colleague to travel south in order to surprise Pétion's forces. Dessalines does so and riding into an ambush, becomes an easy victim for the mercenaries waiting for him in the woods.

Christophe officially justifies Dessalines' murder as a difficult but necessary act for the sake of the country ruined under the latter's leadership, and proposes himself as a candidate for the monarchy only as the "country's physician,/ Admitting deceptions to restore her sanity." (HC, p.35) In reality however he is motivated not by idealism but a burning desire to be king. On finding that the ambition of Dessalines coincides

with his, "(wanting) to sit on an only throne" (HC, p.23), he plots the death of his former friend and after the murder, proceeds to turn on his associate Pétion as well. And in the mould of Shakespeare's arch villain Richard 111, Christophe, together with his aide Vastey, bribe people and orchestrate a crowd which, demanding that he be made king, gives legitimacy to Christophe's assumption of the throne.

Christophe as King soon turns as autocratic as Dessalines. Proud and arrogant he shouts at his Generals, "You are fools; I do not tie the shoelaces of history;/ I am the history of which you speak." (HC, p.12) Brelle accuses him of being one who has "With hammer and hatred (broken)/ What Toussaint built", one whose "hate walks out of screens/ With fifty murders smiling in its hands", and tells him "You have become worse than your Dessalines;/ You have grown mad with satisfaction and despair" and asks, "How long, king, will you continue to wear/ A cloak of blood around an ex-slave's shoulder?" (HC, p.50)

That Brelle should refer to Christophe's slave past is significant. Attaining the monarchy was for both Dessalines and Christophe the apogee of their quest to restructure Haitian society and bring dignity to their lives. Their downfall however was also, according to Walcott, conditioned by their past as slaves, for their ruin lay for the playwright, in their inability to handle the meteoric rise from the status of slave to king. They were to revel in their power after decades of

deprivation in a manner which vindicated Brelle's warning that "The extreme of tyranny happens when/ The gaoled turn on their gaolers" (HC, p.7) - in effect turning out to be as reprehensible in their tyranny and abuse of power as their former colonial masters. Dessalines, unable to transcend his hatred for the white plantocracy and colonial bureaucracy under whom he suffered goes on a rampage against all whites. Christophe, engaged in a "nigger search for fame" which would drag "like a meteor across (his) black rule" (HC, p.36) invests all his resources into building grand symbols signifying the slave's achievement and ability to appreciate the best that European civilization has to offer.

Such a monument was Christophe's fortress at La Ferriere. Built on the edge of a cliff to resemble the prow of a ship, Vandercook describes it as "a fortress that even from the sea twenty miles away looms in majestic silhouette against the sky. It squares off the peak of a mountain that lifts above the hills that neighbour it. They are shouldering hills, covered with thick jungle and littered with masses of titanic stone. But Christophe's citadel masters them, broods over them in its loneliness, its isolation, and its achievement of the sense of the sure supremacy of human greatness." (BM, p.4)

Walcott does not share Vandercook's enthusiasm for the grandeur of La Ferriere or its necessity as a defence. For the playwright the citadel is "a monument to egomania, more than a strategic castle; an effort to reach God's height."

(Twilight, p.14) Thus in Henri Christophe, La Ferriere, symbol of the new identity of the Haitian people, becomes for Christophe, an obsession. It also comes to represent his personal power in the land and a showpiece of his cultural taste, equal to that of his one time European masters. Christophe declares therefore that his chateau

...shall obstruct the strongest season,
 So high the hawk shall giddy in its gyre
 Before it settles on the carved turrets.
 My floors shall reflect the faces that pass over
 them
 And foreign trees spread out the shade of govern-
 ment
 I'll pave a room with golden coins, so rich,
 The old archbishop will smile indulgently at heaven
 from
 The authenticity of my chateaux.
 I will have Arabian horses, yellow haired serving
 boys
 And in the night the chateaux will be lit
 With lanterns bewildering as fireflies,
 Over the lawns at night, like mobile candelabra.
 I who was slave am now king.

(HC, p.41)

For Walcott La Ferriere is a symbol of what (echoing Fanon) he termed in "Twilight", "that wrestling contradiction of being white in mind and black in body" and which affected these black slave heroes whose cultural identity, like those of Walcott's own generation, had been assaulted by the colonial enterprise. (Twilight, p.12) Christophe's obsession with the "authenticity" of his castle, his designs for its lavishness equal to that of the best in Europe was proof for Walcott of the need on the part of the colonized black subject to assert his/her equality, in terms however, the colonial master would appreciate and accept however grudgingly.

La Ferriere was a project which brought Christophe personal tragedy, for the zeal with which he had it constructed, diverting treasury resources to it and relentlessly exacting hard labour from his workforce for what was a monument to allay the ghosts of his past, contributed to his alienation from his Generals as well as the masses and ultimately his downfall. Brelle, pleading with Christophe to "frame a just constitution" and initiate a benevolent leadership also complains, "God, what a waste of blood, these cathedrals, castles, built;/ Bones in the masonry, skulls in the architrave,/ Tired masons falling from the chilly turrets" (HC,pp.47-8) referring to the harsh determination with which Christophe supervised the project at La Ferriere, alienating the masses who resented his ruthlessness in exacting their labour and who whispered, according to Vandercook, that on the nights Christophe himself worked on the masonry he buried in its turrets, golden treasure. (BM,p.172)

Although Walcott's intent in writing the play was to celebrate "the inaccessible achieved", as one reads Henri Christophe, the impression left by all the Haitian characters except for Brelle, who, significantly, is white, is a very negative one. We have already seen how cruel Dessalines was. That he describes his massacring of the whites as "red fun" is evidence of the sadistic pleasure he gets from exacting revenge and his relish in power. He has neglected the needs of his society, is a treacherous schemer, hypocrite and tyrant.

Christophe is no better. Insatiably ambitious, he stops at nothing to gain control of the country by becoming king, and is even a worse hypocrite than Dessalines, feigning loyalty to his friend while engaged in his very betrayal. Pétion and Vastey are schemers as well and therefore untrustworthy. They serve whatever cause suits their needs of material wealth and power the best. Vastey declares, "I am tired of war; I want a little money./ But I'll make war to get money" (HC, p.13), and Pétion does not need much encouragement to join Christophe in plotting Dessalines' overthrow, and indeed turns on Christophe himself later. Sylla is described as a doddering old fool, and not one of this Haitian hierarchy is trustful of the other. The other representatives of black Haitian society in the play are equally vile. The army is shown to be undisciplined, having refused to return to the fields and plantations after being demobbed. Its soldiers are disloyal, deserting their Generals Dessalines and Christophe when under attack, Dessalines' soldiers taking part in his ambush in fact. There are stooges who can be easily bribed by ambitious politicians and society is shown to be utterly brutalized - the messenger enjoys relating how he "skewered a white martyr under an alter" and raped and plundered (HC, p.22), and the only other "commoners" we meet are hired mercenaries. It is only Brelle who is honest and courageous and humanitarian. And he is white.

What is the reason for such negative portrayals on Walcott's part? C.L.R. James describes Dessalines as one who, although ruthless and intellectually less aware than Toussaint or Moise

of the issues at stake, was decisive and a man of action - qualities Walcott presents, particularly in Dessalines' speech to his colleagues on page 4 -, but never dramatizes effectively enough as those which were positive and indeed necessary, given the Haitian socio-political and economic circumstances. Of Christophe James stated that he was "a man of conspicuous ability and within his circumstances an enlightened ruler".²² More importantly, Vandercook - Walcott's acknowledged source - gave Christophe due credit in Black Majesty for his pioneering achievements in education and commerce. With his own money Christophe had founded a Royal College and financed a chair of anatomy and surgery whose first incumbent was his personal physician Dr. Duncan Stewart from Edinburgh, and had transformed the economy of his bankrupt country by creating a currency of gourds with which for instance he bought coffee which he bartered to European traders for gold etc. (BM, p.109)

There is however, nothing of these achievements in Walcott's play. Henri Christophe is an early play and in his effort to caution against racial hatred and seeing in history pretexts for revenge, Walcott has no doubt drawn his characters on an extreme scale for his didactic purposes. But nine years later, Walcott was to repeat his portrayals of Dessalines and Christophe in Drums and Colours. Written to felicitate the opening of the first Federal Parliament of the West Indies in Trinidad in April 1958, Walcott designed the play as a series of scenes depicting various

²² C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins, p.393.

points in West Indian history. Part Two of the play entitled "Rebellion" dramatizes scenes from the Haitian revolution. Once again both Dessalines and Christophe are presented as heinous characters. They are drunk - Toussaint reprimands them for "getting drunk like sergeants"²³ - and revel in bloodshed. Savouring a battlefield strewn with corpses Christophe asks, "they smell wonderful, don't they?/ Burnt flesh and trampled muck and sweating rain."²⁴ Their betrayal of Toussaint in the play is purely for personal gain, each of them having designs on creating a monarchy in Haiti for themselves. They have absolutely no respect for their leader, they refer to him as an ape and their "bill of sale. The meat we dice for".²⁵ They are portrayals not of two successful soldiers who played a great and important part in the revolutionary campaigns, but of two drunken sadistic louts, energized by personal ambition.

The key to Walcott's portrayals in Henri Christophe lies partly in his statement in "Twilight" that these "heroes" sprang to his mind "drenched with Elizabethan literature out of the same darkness as Webster's Flaminco, from a flickering world of mutilation and heresy." (Twilight, p.11) For the playwright, these leaders of the revolution emanated more from a melodramatic Jacobean world of darkness and torment than the world Vandercook had depicted in Black Majesty or the reality of the Caribbean for

²³ Derek Walcott, Drums and Colours in Caribbean Quarterly 7 nos.1 and 2, March-June 1961, p.74

²⁴ Ibid., p.71.

²⁵ Ibid., p.73.

that matter. It is not surprising therefore that the role models for Dessalines and Christophe are the most tormented and ambitious of Shakespeare's heroes - Richard III, Macbeth, and at times, Brutus and Hamlet. The correlative between the bogus crowns Shakespeare's Richard III and Walcott's Christophe orchestrate in order to legitimize their assumptions to their respective thrones has already been noted. It is a borrowing acknowledged in fact in the quote from Richard III with which Walcott prefaces Scene 5 of Henri Christophe, which marks the point from which Christophe, like Richard, resorts to cunning and treachery to attain his royal ambition. There are echoes of Macbeth in Dessalines, too steeped in blood to turn back, and a repeat of Caesar's coronation when Dessalines impatiently crowns himself king of an Independent Haiti.

Walcott's portrayals in Henri Christophe and particularly Drums and Colours, locate the playwright as one whose agenda was the same as Soyinka's when the latter wrote A Dance of the Forests. Both Drums and A Dance of the Forests were written for celebrations marking historic phases in the playwrights' respective countries. Yet subverting the expectations of celebration and festivity, both playwrights choose to depict figures from their past history and mythology who are not lavished with adulation but assessed critically. But whereas Soyinka offers, through the figure of Demoke and a return to Yoruba "spirituality" the possibility of meaningful social regeneration at least, Walcott's characters remain steeped in

hatred and bitterness and have no vision for transcending their immediate bloodlust and hunger for power.

Walcott's characters were also created at a time when, as the playwright himself admitted in "Twilight", "Despite my race, I could not believe that He (God) would choose such men as his engines." (Twilight, p.13) It was a time when, influenced by European cultural schooling, the playwright negated the ability of his own West Indian people. Thus in Henri Christophe Walcott, believing "that the moral of tragedy could only be Christian", rounds off the fates of these "heroes" "with the proper penitence" for daring to subvert the ordered hierarchy. Dessalines is brutally killed and Christophe ends up on his throne amidst decay and ruin in his kingdom, deranged from a stroke neither Christian prayers nor African Gods can cure, forced in the end when under attack from Pétion, to take his own life.

Henri Christophe is however an important play in the context of West Indian drama. In his article "Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies", Errol Hill makes no mention of the state of theatre in St. Lucia (except to state that St. Lucia had its first theatre in 1832) until the emergence of the St. Lucia Arts Guild which, with several other groups "were to have", according to Hill, "a profound influence on the future of drama

in the region."²⁶ It was with a production of Henri Christophe that Walcott and his brother launched the Arts Guild in 1950, so that the play is a pioneering work in many ways, not only as Walcott's first major dramatic work but also one which marks a landmark in St. Lucian theatre history.

Errol Hill who directed the play in a production of Henri Christophe at the Hans Crescent Hall in London in 1952 stated of it, "There are some extremely powerful scenes but the poet's lyrical exuberance has perhaps, led him to neglect full dramatic development of character."²⁷ While this is undoubtedly true, and the play's language and references are moreover unsuited to its characters who are illiterate and can barely sign their names, it is in the poetry of Henri Christophe that one best finds the celebration of the Haitian achievement that Walcott meant the play to be. Deliberately heightened, the verse these Haitian characters speak is full of arresting images and complex idioms and is at its most lyrical in the speech of Sylla, an old man lost in recollection. And yet, the very project of crafting a language which is Elizabethan in tone, and depicting characters who are essentially Jacobean, presenting the Haitian leaders in guises radically different from their own, only served to undermine Walcott's initial intention of ^{celebrating} what the Haitian

²⁶ Errol Hill, "Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies," Caribbean Quarterly 18 no.4, December 1972, p.28.

²⁷ Quoted in Samuel Omo Asein, "The Growth and Reputation of Derek Walcott as a Playwright," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, July 1974, p.115.

revolution achieved. It would take him five to eight years to "return to the source" and, in learning to use St. Lucian languages, present West Indian characters of truly heroic stature in The Sea at Dauphin (1954) and Ti-Jean and His Brothers (1958) which will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7

TOWARDS A SYNCRETIC LANGUAGE:

THE SEA AT DAUPHIN AND TI-JEAN AND HIS BROTHERS

SEA AT DAUPHIN

The four years that intervened between Henri Christophe (1949) and Sea at Dauphin (written in 1953-4)¹ were to prove crucial in Walcott's development as a playwright. They were the years he spent in Jamaica, having left St. Lucia to read at first for a BA Degree and then a Diploma in Education at the University College of the West Indies (UCWI) at Mona, and a period in which he was exposed for the first time, to a fertile climate of rigorous debate on issues of politics and nationalism in the West Indies.

Samuel O. Asein states in an important article entitled "Walcott's Jamaica Years"² that the early 1950s was a time in

¹ Derek Walcott, Sea at Dauphin in Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

² Samuel Omo Asein, "Walcott's Jamaica Years," The Literary Half-Yearly 21, no.2. July 1980. The article is important as Asein is the only critic to date to address the significance of this Jamaican period on Walcott's work.

which "there was what could be easily described as a new awakening, a cultural renaissance of some sort, which took the form of a renewed search for cultural roots based on a vigorous nationalist ethos that permeated the entire Caribbean society, albeit with varying degrees of intensity from one island to the other."³ In Jamaica, this was in fact no new awakening but a maturing of the political awareness and nationalism that had emanated from the widespread labour riots of 1937-8, the consequent formation of political organizations such as the People's National Party headed by Norman Manley and the Trade Union Movement under the leadership of Bustamente.⁴ With increased political devolution after the riots, universal suffrage in 1941 and growing emphasis on popular education, the social and political awareness which had taken root among the Jamaican intelligentsia was, by the 1940s, finding expression as Kenneth Ramchand describes in The West Indian Novel and Its Background, in literary journals like Focus, founded by Edna Manley in Jamaica in 1943. Nor were such magazines confined to the Jamaican scene, for there was Bim (Barbados, 1942), Kyk-Over-Al (Guyana, 1945) and the influential BBC Radio programme "Caribbean Voices" all of which placed emphasis in a concerted way for the first time on a literature depicting West

³ Ibid.p.29.

⁴ See Gordon K.Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies (New York and London: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1969) Chapter 7 for a detailed description of the growth of Jamaican nationalism.

Indian life and grounded in local issues.⁵

The University College of the West Indies founded during this period in 1948 was a fertile ground for the dissemination of these nationalist ideals. When Walcott entered the institution in 1950 he was caught up therefore in what Asein describes as "the spirit of that early phase in the history of Mona" which looked with excitement to new political and cultural possibilities for the West Indies.⁶ Thus the University Literary Society for instance of which Walcott was a member, had as one of its objectives "research work in West Indian literature", and the playwright who had with Henri Christophe, the formation of the St.Lucia Arts Guild and more importantly the publication of his first collection of poetry 25 Poems (1948) been already hailed by Henry Swanzy of "Caribbean Voices" as "the voice out of the West Indies that we are waiting for"⁷, engaged, through the many extra-curricular activities he participated in⁸, in furthering what he had already embarked on - building a

⁵ Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp.71-2.

⁶ Asein, p.30.

⁷ Ibid.p.27.

⁸ See Asein for an account of Walcott's extra-curricular activities including his involvement in campus publications like "The Barb" and "The Pelican" while at U.C.W.I.,Mona.

tradition of creative writing rooted in the West Indies itself.

Despite Walcott's emphasis in works like 25 Poems and Henri Christophe on issues of immediate relevance to his own society such as race and coloniality, the playwright was in these works, imitative of the English literary tradition in terms of language, forms and references. It was his involvement in the University Dramatic Society while at Mona and through it his recognition, as shall be discussed shortly, of the Irish nationalist theatre and particularly the achievement of J.M.Synge that were to be crucial in his decision to turn to local languages - St.Lucian patois in Sea at Dauphin - and celebrate in a way he had not done in Henri Christophe the true strengths of the Caribbean.

As Samuel Asein describes, the University Dramatic Society was largely influenced by Errol Hill who, in April 1953 joined the staff of the Extra-Mural Studies Department at Mona, having completed a course at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. With Hill at the helm, the society had become increasingly interested in the possibilities of a West Indian National Theatre, which, as Asein states was one of Hill's "cardinal points in the new cultural crusade"⁹, and which he was to later argue emphatically for in his book The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre (1972) and in articles

⁹ Asein, p.33

like "Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies".¹⁰ Hill believed that this theatre could be made possible only by mining the vast resources of West Indian folklore and theatrical ritual, and that it was important for West Indian dramatists to address first and foremost local audiences with settings and languages they identified with and understood.

That Sea at Dauphin is dedicated to Errol Hill gives a fair indication of the influence of Hill on Walcott during this period. Definite proof of this comes however in the longer dedication Walcott wrote on the manuscript of Dauphin he gave Hill stating, "Thanks for all the help and encouragement. I really enjoyed our quarrels in a damn good cause. Best of luck...When what we want comes, whether you and I are there to see a fine flowering West Indian theatre, or not, we can feel we tried to do a little."¹¹

With works both Hill and Walcott would have regarded as representative of "true" West Indian theatre as yet unavailable,

¹⁰ Errol Hill, "Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies," Caribbean Quarterly 18, no.4, December 1972.

¹¹ Asein, p.35. In an interview with Edward Hirsch (Contemporary Literature, 20, No.3, 1979.pp.279-92) Walcott spoke at length on Sea at Dauphin but failed to acknowledge the influence of Hill on the work. One can only surmise that by the 1970s, Walcott had fallen out with Hill who was vigorously campaigning for the recognition of Caribbean folk theatrical forms as National Theatre, which, as has been shown in Chapter 5, Walcott felt was too exclusive and narrowly nationalistic.

the University Dramatic Society turned to the Irish nationalist theatre and the works of J.M.Synge and Sean O'Casey.¹² To begin with, there was recognition that common colonial experiences bound the Irish and West Indian together. Commenting on what he found inspiring about Irish writers like Yeats, Synge and Joyce, Walcott pointed to this fact in ~~the~~ interview with Edward Hirsch. He stated,

I've always felt some kind of intimacy with the Irish poets because one realised that they were also colonials with the same kind of problems that existed in the Caribbean. They were the niggers of Britain. Now, with all of that, to have those astounding achievements of genius, whether by Joyce, or Yeats or Beckett, illustrated that one could come out of a depressed, deprived, oppressed situation and be defiant and creative at the same time.¹³

Secondly, those like Walcott, self-consciously in the vanguard of creating a body of literature rooted in West Indian situations and localities, realized that these Irish works not only provided positive examples of the possibilities of creativity despite the negations of colonial and religious repression, but in being grounded in local settings and languages, and successful, also a direction which they, as West Indian writers should emulate. For a playwright like Synge had,

¹² In 1954/55 the society produced for instance O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock which, dealing with issues of nationalist and sexual politics and depicting tenement life was a work particularly relevant to Jamaican society at the time.

¹³ Derek Walcott in "Interview with Derek Walcott" by Edward Hirsch, Contemporary Literature 20, no.3, 1979. p.288.

on the advice Yeats is said to have given him in Paris in 1896 to go back to Ireland and the Aran Islands and "express a life that has never found expression", engaged in his own "Adamic" endeavour. Recognizing in the Aran Islanders people who had not "shut their lips on poetry", contrasting them and their world albeit romantically with the metropolis which he found mechanistic and materialistic, Synge embarked on celebrating in his work the popular imagination of the Islanders as one "fiery, and magnificent and tender".¹⁴ He had turned to the language of these people in his work, stating "When I was writing The Shadow of the Glen some years ago, I got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen".¹⁵ And although critics like Lyn Innes, Nicholas Green and Michael O'hAodha have identified Synge's dramatic language not as an accurate transcript of Aran Island dialect but as one radically reshaped to suit the exigencies of his dramatic situations and characters¹⁶, Synge's

¹⁴ J.M.Synge, Preface to Playboy of the Western World (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), p.12.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.11.

¹⁶ See Lyn Innes, "Naked Truth, Fine Clothes and Fine Phrases in Synge's Playboy of the Western World," Myth and Reality in Irish Literature ed. Joseph Ronsley (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), pp.63-75;

Nicholas Grene, Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975)

Michael O'hAodha, Theatre in Ireland (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,

success in handling dialect for his artistic purposes was to prove inspirational to Walcott.

Thus Walcott told Edward Hirsch:

The whole question of dialect began to interest me. When I read "Riders to the Sea" I realised what he (Synge) had attempted to do with the language of the Irish. He had taken a fishing port kind of language and gotten beauty out of it, a beat, something lyrical. Now that was inspiring, and the obvious model for The Sea at Dauphin...When I tried to translate the speech of the St.Lucian fisherman into an English Creole, all I was doing was taking that kind of speech and translating it, or re-translating it, into an English-inflected Creole, and that was a totally new experience for me, even if it did come out of Synge.¹⁷

In a radical departure then from the form and diction of Henri Christophe - a departure prompted by Walcott's appreciation for the first time, albeit via Synge, of his own linguistic environment - the playwright turns in Dauphin to portraying the St.Lucian peasant in his own language. The recognition on Walcott's part that language "couldn't be separated from the landscape" as he put it in his interview with Hirsch¹⁸ was to prove crucial. For not only did it provoke Walcott to return after the Elizabethan rhetoric of Henri Christophe to his own West Indian linguistic roots, but in taking

1974).

¹⁷ Quoted in Hirsch, "Interview with Walcott," pp.288-9.

¹⁸ Ibid.,p.287.

St. Lucian patois seriously, in realizing its dramatic potential also come to an understanding of the strengths of the West Indian in a way he had not grasped and conveyed in the earlier play.

Walcott chooses in Dauphin to depict those strengths by dramatizing the tenacity of the St. Lucian fisherfolk in the face of the deprivation they suffer, living in a poverty-stricken "colonial backwater". (Twilight, p.14) In the play, the adversity these fishermen face is symbolized by the harsh nature that engulfs Dauphin as it lies uneasily on St. Lucia's "nerve-wracked Atlantic coast". (Dauphin, p.45) In "Leaving School" Walcott described this same coast as "heart-breaking"¹⁹, and the descriptions in the play affirm the uncompromising harshness of nature that pits itself against Dauphin. The village is battered by fierce winds and an angry sea, and enveloped by grey sky and bitter cold. As the play opens two hours before sunrise on an "Age-grey morning", the fishermen Afa and Gacia open their conversation with reference to the wind which, even though at half-strength (Gacia warns Afa that they will encounter it at full force as they pass Sablisse (Dauphin, p.46), seems menacing enough. The forty-year old Afa who, as an experienced fisherman has encountered bad weather before comments bewildered, "Is only natural for the wind to blow so bad, but to turn, and turn" and the equally experienced Gacia remarks, "in all my life I never

¹⁹ Derek Walcott, "Leaving School," The London Magazine 5, no.6, September 1965. p.6.

see it more vex and it have many seasons, fishing nasse, I see it bad; but never in a life, like this." (Dauphin, p.47.)

The bad weather of the morning has moreover hurled itself at Dauphin for a fortnight, causing heavy floods and earthslips - Gacia tells Afa that "They have many garden wash down in Fond River". (Dauphin, p.47) There is no hope of relief from this hostile nature in the near future either, the fishermen realizing "It staying so for a next month". (Dauphin, p.47) Dauphin is in crisis then, and its enemy is not only a malevolent nature which beats in from the sea. For complementing the nerve-wracking forces typified by the sea at Dauphin, is the aridity of its infertile land. As Afa remarks, "The land is hard, this Dauphin land have stone/ Where it should have some heart" (Dauphin, p.61) and the seventy year old Indian Hounakin, whose wife Rama has died of TB two days before the events of the play, is childless, suffers from cataract, loss of hearing, a bad back, and has no hope of sustenance from the barren land he tills, is the embodiment of the deprivation of Dauphin in the play.

There are many echoes of Riders to the Sea throughout Dauphin, indicating that its influence on Walcott's play was not confined to dramatic language. The fierce wind and angry sea that the community of Dauphin face for instance is there in Riders, in which its fishing community, situated thirty miles from Galway, is similarly buffeted by strong winds and violent seas, in which Michael had drowned nine days earlier. There is constant

reference to this threatening wind in Synge's play and it is acknowledged by the characters as having the power to hinder the search for Michael's body or wash it ashore, depending from which side it blows. As it happens, it is the feared south westerly wind which is in full force as the play opens, hampering the search for the body and of course, threatening the safety of Bartley who has to journey by sea to the Galway horse fair.

The constant reference and therefore preoccupation in both Riders and Dauphin to the extremity of this bad weather is wholly realistic given the importance of nature for these fishing communities which rely on its benevolence for their livelihoods. The references serve moreover to keep the severity of the situation in the minds of the audience and thus build up dramatic tension against which the tragedy of individual lives will be played. For repeated warnings of bad weather take on an ominous note in the light of Bartley's intended trip to the horse fair, and heightens our anxiety for Maurya who has lost all her menfolk - husband, father-in-law and five sons - to the sea, and may now lose her youngest as well. A similar sense of inevitability pervades Dauphin as the fishermen confront a sea which, in Gacia's words "God self can't sail" (Dauphin, p.59) but are forced to ply because of their poverty - evidence of which we see in their tattered clothing and patched sails. Thus Afa has no illusions as to his possible fate. He states "This basin men call sea/ Never get red for men blood it have. My turn is next." (Dauphin, p.61)

The dangers these characters face is heightened in both plays by allusions to others who have already succumbed to them. In Dauphin there is recollection of those whose lives the sea has claimed - Bolo, Raphael, Habal and Gacia's brother Annelles whose decomposed body was washed ashore to be found by a boy catching crabs two miles from Dennery. (Dauphin, p.58) In particular, Bolo, to whom Afa was once apprenticed, is recalled by the villagers as a brave man who was yet engulfed by the sea, and whose fate stands therefore as a symbol of the vulnerability of these fishermen in the face of such overwhelmingly hostile forces. Bolo was brave and strong - Afa recalls that he was able to "pull canot with his one hand" (Dauphin, p.62) and thought to be invincible. Despite the belief that Bolo "would never drown" (Dauphin, p.58), he lost his life accordingly, and this picture of man reduced by insurmountable forces echoes Riders as well when Cathleen remarks to her sister, "Ah, Nora, isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?"²⁰

Despite the obvious dangers and destitution faced by the characters in Walcott's play, there is a dignity about them which can only be described as awesome. Hounakin, as already

²⁰ J.M.Synge, Riders to the Sea (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), p.87. Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

noted, is the most deprived figure in the play and yet has great strength of character. Despite his wife's illness and their poverty, Hounakin and Rama cannot face the prospect of having to beg for their survival. "Rama say no medicine we must not beg./I did not want to beg and Rama die" the old man explains (Dauphin, p.67), echoing here the same sentiment (and therefore common ethic) as Gacia who comments of the alcoholic and sick Debel rather more strongly than the gentle Hounakin ever would have, "He should die, since to beg is worse." (Dauphin,p.46) Physically dilapidated, wrapped in rags and "squinting through narrow gummed eyes set in a face worn and cracked with heat" (Dauphin,p.55) Hounakin accepts nothing but the need to earn his livelihood, and because his land is barren asks Afa and Augustin whether he can join their fishing expedition, prepared to embark on a new vocation despite its dangers and his physical frailty "just to feed" as he says, "a old man and the dog". (Dauphin,p.67)

The depth of Hounakin's grief at Rama's death underscores moreover, the positive forces of love and companionship in the play, particularly as it contrasts with Afa's cynicism which has resulted in the latter's isolation within the community. Hounakin's lament over his wife's death takes on a poetic lyricism - such moments of heightened emotion are always conveyed in verse in the play - as he describes his utter dejection and loneliness. He tells Afa and Augustin,

since she dead it have two days I only counting
birds,
And even bird have woman, fisherman know:
I know where they fly making nest for wind by

Pointe,
 But they still screaming: "Rama dead, old man,
old man, Rama dead."
 To dead; what is to dead? not dead I fraid...
 For old man that is nothing, wind.
 But when one woman you loving fifty years,
 That time they dead, it don't like they should
have bird,
 And bread to eat, a house, and dog to feed.
 It is to take a net in you hand to catch the
wind,
 To beat head on a stone, to take sand in you'
hand,
 And that is it, compere, that is it true,
 When Rama dead I cry after the dog tired. (Dauphin, p.66)

It is a speech which shows Hounakin's only treasure in life to have been a rich and fulfilling relationship with his wife so that losing her, he loses everything. Even nature seems to confirm this. Bird songs ring in his ear as evocations of Rama's death, and life without her becomes for him intangible - "It is to take" in his words, "a net in you hand and to catch the wind". Intense in its grief, it is a speech which, not surprisingly, moves even the generally undemonstrative Afa who responds by inviting the old man to sit down and share some bread with him. (Dauphin, p.66) It is important to note that this speech marks a summation of Walcott's linguistic achievement in Dauphin. Hounakin's language is shown to be able to carry complex emotions and poetic imagery. His language is not a direct transcript of patois, for Walcott's purpose in Dauphin was to create a dramatic language out of both patois and standard English which would suit the tone and theme of the play, but the playwright showed unequivocally here that patois was no longer merely the language of satire and that of the yokel, but one capable of conveying deep emotion and the expression of a sensitive man.

Hounakin confronts his fate with stoicism and courage however, for he refuses to be cynical or bitter. In his sensitivity to the nature that surrounds him and the people he lives with - he is very aware for instance of Afa's animosity towards him and intervenes at one point to break up the tension between Afa and Augustin as they quarrel over him (Dauphin,p.56) - he comes across as a man who harbours no malice or egotism but stands rather for a gentle humility which serves to enhance his stature in the play. He is a tired old man who commits suicide in the end, and it is this indelible mark he leaves as a man who is generous in spirit and full of dignity that underscores the appalling injustice of his life in the play.

In contrast to Hounakin stands Afa whose forceful figure dominates the play throughout. His very resistance, engaged as he is in a dangerous livelihood, to the hostile forces of nature that surround him spell not a fatalistic resignation to his circumstances but an active protest against the injustices of life in Dauphin. Under pressure because of the bad weather Afa is furious at Hounakin's failure to report for the fishing expedition at 4 o'clock in the morning - he declares "Just now sun will rise, and wind working already. And fish waiting for nobody is working late." (Dauphin,p.48) He rejects Augustin's plea for compassion on the old man and rages against his fishing partner in a forceful speech which is as much a protest against the forces that constitute life in Dauphin as it is about his own

constant struggle for survival. He asks,

And this new thing, compassion? Where is compassion? Is I does make poor people poor, or this sea vex? Is I that put rocks where should dirt by Dauphin side, man cannot make garden grow? Is I that swell little children belly with bad worm, and woman to wear clothes white people use to wipe their foot? In my head is stone, and my heart is another, and without stone, my eyes would burst for that, would look for compassion on woman belly. I born and deading in this coast that have no compassion to grow food for children, no fish enough to buy new sail, no twine. Every day sweat, sun, and salt, and night is salt and sleep, and all the dead days pack away and stink, is Dauphin life.

(Dauphin, p.53)

The driving force of this speech lies no doubt in Afa's passionate anger at the poverty of his village, and it is easy to see behind this Walcott's own resentment at St. Lucia's history which was/is to him tragic. Describing the country as an "under-developed", poverty-stricken and isolated island the playwright noted in "Leaving School" that "Her (sic) name was clouded in darkness and misfortune; Columbus had named her after a blind saint; her saint's day was December thirteenth" and that "Even her natural history was tragic". Walcott went on to state "I had seen enough in childhood to believe it: a landslide that swallowed a mountain village after heavy rains, the memory of Saint Pierre, and, in the year I left school, a fire that destroyed half of the town".²¹

²¹ Walcott, "Leaving School," p.4. Edward Baugh writes in Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision: Another Life (London: Longman, 1978) that "On the night of Saturday, 19th June 1948, four-fifths of Castries was destroyed by a fire which started in a tailor's shop...The catastrophe was traumatic and epochal...To the eighteen year old Walcott it was tragic and romantic. Here

There is constant questioning in the play of the justice of such a history. For the people of Dauphin, this justice is a divine one. Hounakin observes, "It looking like somebody shaking this basin of the world,/ And making waves where man and boats is drowning. Is/ God." (Dauphin,p.68) In turn the pleas for release from such suffering fall on deaf ears for prayers are of no avail. Hounakin states

I kneel on my two knees,
I say, when Rama coughing all this time,
God you is old man like me, you put me
here, I pray, I
work,
I never steal when my belly full of wind...
I sin, I make confession, is the same.
I work, make absolution is the same
I love, I have no child, and is the same...

(Dauphin,p.68)

The protest by Afa against such an indifferent and at times positively hostile God - he declares "God is a white man. The Sky is his blue eye/ His spit on Dauphin is the sea" (Dauphin, p.61) - becomes, with Hounakin's death, a revolt against the religious establishment of Dauphin. The figure who stands for this regime in the play is the French priest Fr.Lavoisier who, by virtue of his complexion and office represents for Afa, a repressive religious authority and hostile white God who unleashes malevolent forces against the poor and helpless black

was his Troy town burning...he began to make poetry from the experience, beginning with the famous "A City's Death By Fire".p.16.

people of Dauphin.

The character of Fr.Lavoisier is drawn by Walcott in the play as a negative, paste-board stereotype.²² The priest stands in sharp contrast to the brave and dignified fishermen of Dauphin. Unlike Hounakin who refuses to beg and live on charity, he lives off the community which feeds and provides for him without bringing in return, any tangible benefit to the village. Afa accuses him of being "a priest white, pale like a shark belly one must feed until we dead, not no young Frenchman lock up in a church don't know coolie man dying because he will not beg!" (Dauphin,p.73) Afa refers here not only to the priest's parasitical existence in the village, but also his neglect of his pastoral duty, evidence of which we see in Lavoisier's ignorance/indifference to Hounakin's plight and hesitancy in confronting Afa and Augustin with the news of the old man's death. For when the fishermen return from their fishing expedition, the priest pushes forward the boy Jules who, while catching whelks at Point Side found Hounakin's body, to relate the events. It is an evasion of duty Afa is quick to seize upon, for it fuels his anger against the whole religious establishment and its sanctimony. He cries as Jules is pushed forward by the priest, "Oui! Is better than any priest saying bettise about God

²² There is no doubt that writing Dauphin in the aftermath of his confrontation with the St.Lucian Catholic church over Henri Christophe (see page 25), Walcott would have been even more determined to expose the church as a parasitic institution, and the negative portrayal of Lavoisier in the play is undoubtedly informed by Walcott's antagonism to the ideology and institution of this church.

for me to fling salt water in his face!" (Dauphin, p.71)

For Afa, Lavoisier is one who, moreover, preaches a message of a Christian God which rings hollow in the face of the destitution suffered by the people of Dauphin. The priest offers little comfort over Hounakin's tragic death. As Augustin breaks down at the news of his godfather's suicide, the priest tells him "Augustin, my son, let the wind come, sea come, let the hurricane blow. It will blow the sand from the heart of many a man and change this world..." (Dauphin, p.72) The barb is against Afa and the advice is for Augustin to accept what has happened as god's will. But the lines are charged with irony given the context in which the events of Dauphin take place. For there is indeed a wind raging, a hurricane blowing and a sea in turmoil. The priest, comfortable and protected on land, living off the community and not having to brave these elements to earn his livelihood, is insensitive to the hostile environment he is protected from, and its impact on the lives of those who support him. In the light of this, his passive acceptance of Hounakin's death and the circumstances which led to it as God's will not only sounds hollow and disingenuous but callous as well. The priest in Riders is similarly seen by Maurya as an unjustly protected outsider, for when he assures her that "the Almighty God won't leave her destitute", she can only remark bitterly of the priest "It's little the like of him knows of the sea".²³

²³ Synge, Riders, p.89.

The sanctimony of Lavoisier, his complicity in disseminating a doctrine which preaches that the endurance of poverty is a strength of character, and even a state of grace (Twilight, p.15) finally brings Afa to breaking point. In the most powerful speech of the play - the one instance when Afa articulates the problematic of the collective community rather than the personal - he rails against the religious establishment and throws his scapular down in a dramatic denunciation of life in Dauphin.

God! (He turns and empties the fish pail on the sand) That is God! A big fish eating small ones. And the sea, that thing there, not a priest white, pale like a shark belly we must feed until we dead, not no young Frenchman lock up in a church don't know coolie man dying because he will not beg! (The women break up and retreat before him) Sacres cooyons! Sacres jamettes saintes! All you can do is what, sing way! way! Hounakin dead and Bolo dead, is all mouth! mouth! (He turns and tears a scapular from his neck and hurls it to the ground) Mi! Mi! Pick it up, pere, is not ours. This scapular not Dauphin own! Dauphin people build the church and pray and feed you, not their own people, and look at Dauphin! Gadez lui! Look at it! You see? Poverty, dirty woman, dirty children, where all the prayers? Where all the money a man should have and friends when his skin old? Dirt and prayers is Dauphin life, in Dauphin, in Canaries, Micoud. Where they have priest is poverty. (Dauphin, pp.72-3)

The central action in the speech, when Afa tears a scapular

from his neck and hurls it to the ground, is loaded with significance. The scapular is for Afa a symbol of the burden of poverty he has to bear. But in denouncing it with the words "This scapular not Dauphin own!" (my emphasis), it ceases to be just a personal symbol and becomes one applicable to the whole community, so that with that action Afa forces his confrontation with the priest onto a wider, collective level. Thus his description of God as "A big fish eating small ones", his likening of Lavoisier to a shark can be read as metonymic of the St. Lucian colonial experience as it points to the complete hegemony/exploitation by the powerful of the small and poor. The consequence of such domination for poor countries like St. Lucia and within it, villages like Dauphin is, that they have to continue supporting the powerful - "Dauphin people build the church and pray and feed you" - to the detriment of their own well-being, so that poverty and sickness is all that pertains in these communities.

At the same time, Afa's anger at the village women's uncritical and passive acceptance of the doctrines of the church points to the colonized subject's own complicity in the colonial enterprise. Steeped in the teachings of the church, they are horrified at Afa's protest and leave the scene as he challenges the priest, wanting no share of his denunciation. By such an action they give notice of their continued support of the church and passive resignation to a force of their oppression. There are striking parallels here between Dauphin and Soyinka's play

The Swamp Dwellers.²⁴ For in Soyinka's play too the men and women of the Ijaw community who live in the swamp are presented as victims of their environment, incessantly plagued by floods which turn their land into swamps. There is a priest, known as the Kadiye, who, in contrast to the poor swamp dwellers, is fat and prosperous as he lives off their offerings, their prayers for help from God benefitting no one but the mediator-priest. Igwezu who returns to the village from a sojourn in the city to cultivate his land challenges the priest, but is unsupported by the rest of the community, and by the play's end has to leave the village and go into exile.

The villagers in both Dauphin and The Swamp Dwellers fail to make an effective political challenge that would change the status quo then, and the reasons for this lie in the nature of Afa's and Igwezu's protest. In Dauphin, despite the force with which Afa denounces the priest - he commands Lavoisier to pick up the scapular in a tone that refuses to be servile - he succumbs to the authority of the priest and retracts his accusations in the most unconvincing way very soon after. His rebellion is no more than a burst of temper - when Gacia asks him why he cursed the priest Afa replies, "I was vex...it mean nothing" (Dauphin,p.78), and his friends who are loyal to the church, are quick to accept and explain his protest in terms of such personal stress. Augustin tells the priest by way of

²⁴ Wole Soyinka, The Swamp Dwellers in Collected Plays 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

explanation, "Don't mind him, Father. He must curse or he will cry." (Dauphin, p.74)

The problem with Afa's protest is that although he forces a connection between the destitution of Dauphin and a parasitic religious regime, he does not point to the violence and exploitation of the church in collusion with colonial authority which keeps Dauphin in poverty. That he points to the exploitation in the fact that Lavoisier feeds on the hospitality of the community which the priest takes for granted and does not reciprocate is true. But the priest is not shown as forcing the people to support him and the church he represents. Thus the violence of the colonial enterprise is effaced. For Afa, as for Igwezu in The Swamp Dwellers, the source of their oppression is a hostile God and a malevolent nature of which the priest/Kadiye and his church are just material symbols. But precisely because the agents of oppression are located on a metaphysical level they cannot be confronted and defeated and so the villagers cannot be energized into any meaningful political action.²⁵

It is this limitation of Afa's protest that makes it

²⁵ Although the machinations of the church as colonial institution are not dramatized in the play, Afa's challenge of the priest as well as the tone of the play which nags at the justice of Dauphin's life were enough to warrant Dauphin its share of church intervention. The Catholic Bishop of the Eastern Caribbean condemned the play for being "bitter and blasphemous" and called Walcott a "savage", while church authorities attempted to prevent Catholic actors from taking part in the play. Stewart Brown, "Derek Walcott: Voices of History," Ph.D thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1987.p.170.

impossible for him to proceed with it and see it through a rebellion for instance which would lead to a change in the status quo. In this sense Dauphin is a pessimistic play for by its end, the people of Dauphin have won no reprieves from the harsh conditions of their life. Lavoisier as representative of a hegemonic institution has neither been forced out or made to initiate concrete projects allowing for instance for greater mechanization to help the fishermen or improved medical facilities for the village. In the end, as the young Jules joins Afa and Augustin in a career at sea, it is the cyclical nature of life at Dauphin that is stressed, with no hope of improved living and working conditions.

What Afa's retraction and the end of Dauphin signify then is Walcott's own inability/refusal to confront the violence of the colonial encounter and therefore the need to refute it unequivocally. To have done so in the play would have been, in Walcott's view, to fall into the trap of a positivist reading of history which would lead to recrimination or despair, depending on one's perspective and interests. But to ignore the violence of the colonial encounter is also to take sides - the side of the colonizer and condemn Afa to a recantation and Dauphin to a cyclical existence from which there is no escape.

Sea at Dauphin is however a powerful play, its achievement rooted in Walcott's recognition and emphasis on celebrating the language and resilience of the St. Lucian peasant in the face of

hostile forces. Driven by necessity - "is work or starve" Gacia states (Dauphin,p.47) - the fishermen of Dauphin take on the elements in full self-knowledge, with no illusions. Afa is aware for instance that he will be the sea's next victim - "This basin men call sea/ Never get red for men blood it have. My turn is next." (Dauphin,p.46) In doing so they display stoic courage, but most of all a practical outlook on life which does not permit indulgence in self-pity or romantic nostalgia. The fishermen's references to nature on which their livelihoods depend is utilitarian. For Afa "Sunrise is sun lying down when fishermen late". (Dauphin,p.55) Their metaphors too are firmly rooted in their work experience - referring to his age Hounakin states "You break your back for seventy cane reap times." (Dauphin,p.68)

These peasants also possess a strong sense of pride which, in contrast to the priest, does not permit them to beg and depend on the charity of others for their livelihoods. And within the community itself we see evidence of a tight-knit group which has closed ranks as it were against the hostile forces that surround it. The two ethnic groups within the native community - Hounakin and wife of Indian origin and the fishermen of African origin - are shown to live harmoniously together. Hounakin is Augustin's godfather and Rama had often entertained the village children to stories, both Afa and Augustin having been among her audience. (Dauphin,p.65) With Rama's death, the most recent in Dauphin as the play opens, we see the whole community, except for Afa in moments of irritation

at Hounakin's tardiness, sympathetic and supportive of the old man at this time of bereavement. Ultimately even Afa joins Augustin in sharing their bread with Hounakin, and as they leave on their expedition, both promise to bring back a fish for Hounakin and a shell to mark Rama's grave, conch shells being often used in St. Lucia to mark the border of graves.²⁶ And Hounakin, although defeated at the end, showed evidence as we have seen of a deep generosity of spirit. Afa, Gacia and Augustin live on to brave the dangers of another day with an instinct for survival which, despite its tragedies, is what gives the play its assertive force.

In celebrating the lives and language of the St. Lucian peasant - the fact that all the characters except for the priest speak in patois is significant, for here is Walcott determining and valorizing characters through language in a way sympathetic to the St. Lucian folk for the first time - the playwright was presenting in Dauphin characters radically different to the black Haitian leaders he had set out to celebrate in Henri Christophe but ended up undermining as a result of his own denial of their achievements and lack of belief in them as leaders and men. Through the stoic fishermen of Dauphin Walcott was also paying homage in a way he had not done in Henri Christophe to the generations of African slave/peasants who survived in the Caribbean despite the traumatic upheavals and

²⁶ Edward Baugh, "Painters and Paintings in "Another Life," Caribbean Quarterly 26, nos.1 & 2, March-June 1980.p.86.

utter degradation of their lives. For Walcott then, these peasants became symbols of "the inevitably rooted man" (Muse, p.21) unlike the urban intellectual whom he attacked in essays like "Muse" and "Twilight" for an identity crisis which drove them towards the African continent at the expense of faith in the West Indies itself.

There is evidence then that by the time Walcott wrote the essays "Muse" and "Twilight" he valorized in a somewhat romantic manner the St.Lucian peasant whose life he found "real" and "valid" in being firmly rooted in the native landscape. It is an admiration clearly informed by the anxiety of his own alienation from this life, for Walcott stated in "Twilight" that "One worked to have the "feel" of the island, bow, gunwhales and stern as jealously as the fishermen knew his boat, and, despite the intimacy of its size to be as free as a canoe out on the ocean." (My emphasis. Twilight, p.15) Sea at Dauphin enabled him then to re-connect with his native environment in a positive way, for out of the recognition of patois came an unequivocal celebration of the St.Lucian peasant for the first time.

Despite the success of the play in the Caribbean - Pat Ismond states that the play was well received throughout the region²⁷ - Sea at Dauphin is the only play Walcott wrote in patois. There followed plays like Harry Dernier, and Ione which

²⁷ Pat Ismond, "Derek Walcott: Development of a Rooted Vision," Ph.D thesis, University of Kent, 1974. p.271.

particularly moved away from St. Lucian forms to the European, being modelled on classical Greek tragedy. In a way, the moment of Afa's recantation in Dauphin predicated this shift in direction, for with Afa's submission to the authority of the priest, Walcott managed an effacement of violence and contradiction which, had they been shown in a way which would have led to successful revolutionary action on the part of the villagers of Dauphin, would have made it impossible for the playwright to revert to European forms.

TI-JEAN AND HIS BROTHERS

It was with Ti-Jean and His Brothers²⁸ that Walcott first attempted to write a play in a self-consciously syncretic form, fusing elements of African and European folk and theatrical traditions. As a child, Walcott had listened to his aunt Sidone who had sung "in a terrible whine" of "children lost in the middle of a forest, where the leaves' ears pricked at the rustling of devils, and one did not know if to weep for the first two brothers of every legend, one strong, the other foolish." (Twilight, p.24) The seeds of Ti-Jean are here, for the play enacts the fate of three brothers, one strong, one foolish and the third cunning, as they confront Papa Bois/ The Devil in the woods to take on a wager which spells being eaten

²⁸ Derek Walcott, Ti-Jean and His Brothers in Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972.)
 Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

by the devil if they lose their temper.

The character of Ti-Jean has its roots in both French and African fairy tales, and the fact that Ti-Jean lives on in St.Lucian legend is not surprising given the Anglo-French-African inheritance of the island. The character differs however in the French and African tales. Although Ti-Jean or "petit" Jean is the youngest son/ smallest person in both traditions, in the French tales he is a child without inheritance who has to fight for his future and does so with courage and determination, while in the African stories he is a monster-child who displays supernatural strength and subverts established social codes and hierarchies.²⁹ The two come together in Walcott's Ti-Jean, for he is in the play, the youngest son of a poor widowed mother who lives in the woods. He has to fight the devil, who, in the guise of a white planter is also colonial agent in the play, for his inheritance/ future, and does so through means of "insubordination".

The figure of Papa Bois too is rooted in St.Lucian life as well as in Trinidad and the Eastern Caribbean. He figures in fact in a parade which precedes the Christmas pageant that takes place in St.Lucia, in which he and his following of Ti-Diables (little devils) are challenged by an acrobat to a duel. The

²⁹ Bridget Jones, "Ti-Jean and His Brothers," Paper read at the conference of the Association of Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies, University of Kent at Canterbury, 24th-31st August 1989. pp.2-3.

acrobat is knocked down by the devil in the first round, but triumphs over Papa Diable with the aid of two friends in the next. The song of the Devil at the end of Ti-Jean is the same as that sung by the masqueraders in this parade.³⁰ And the song of "Goliath" which Ti-Jean sings as he sets out to challenge the devil is, moreover, rooted in kalinda rhythms.

Using song³¹, dance and a narrator for the first time in a play, incorporating indigenous folk characters and rituals in a text also informed by European traditions - acknowledged at the beginning when the "Greek-croak" of the animals pays homage to the choruses of classical Greek comic drama - Walcott was creating a "folk musical" genre which, in the context of contemporary formal West Indian theatre was original. Aware of this achievement, Walcott acknowledged Ti-Jean as a seminal play, one "Out of (which) I knew what I wanted" as he stated in "Meanings"³², and because it incorporated both European and West African elements, named it his "Most West Indian Play"³³, clearly noting in the work a syncretism embodying for him what the West Indies should stand for today. Critics of the play also saw it as a path-breaker in terms of West Indian theatre and Walcott's

³⁰ Albert Ashaolu, "Allegory in Ti-Jean and His Brothers," World Literature Written in English 16, no.1, April 1977. pp.209-210.

³¹ The music for the play was composed by Andre Tanker.

³² Derek Walcott, "Meanings", p.46.

³³ Derek Walcott, "Derek's Most West Indian Play," Trinidad Sunday Guardian, 21st June 1970. p.7.

own development as a playwright. Eric Roach hailed Walcott for having "forged an instrument for the country"³⁴, Victor Questel and Errol Hill praised Ti-Jean for being Walcott's freest work in which the written and spoken, the formal and informal combine easily and with economy³⁵, and Lloyd Coke acknowledged/ upheld Walcott's statement for synthesis in the play.³⁶

Syncretism as it is manifest in Ti-Jean does not however mean the equal existence of all the elements Walcott attempts to bring together in the play. This becomes clear as we look at the language of the play. Walcott stated, "I wanted, without knowing it, to write a softly measured metre whose breathing was formally articulated yet held the lyrical stresses of dialect speech."³⁷ What the playwright was striving for was a poetry which reflected and was close in tone however to common speech. But "dialect" is also used in the play as a signifier of character, marking differences not only of background but, as will be shown, the **nature** of the characters themselves.

Papa Bois/ The Devil/ White Planter who embodies the

³⁴ Eric Roach, "This musical fuses both traditions of folk legend," Trinidad Sunday Guardian, 28th June 1970. p.11.

³⁵ Victor Questel, "Derek Walcott: Contradiction and Resolution," Ph.D thesis, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 1979. pp.228 & 235.

³⁶ Lloyd Coke, "Walcott's Mad Innocents," Savacou 5, June 1971. p.122.

³⁷ Derek Walcott, "Derek's Most West Indian Play," p.7. My emphasis.

syncretism Walcott set out to achieve in the play, being the figure from West African legend and colonial agent, speaks throughout in standard English, except, significantly, when he gets drunk and lapses briefly into patois and even underclass English. (p.151) Patois is the language of caricatured figures such as Gros-Jean and Mi-Jean, a linguistic choice which reflects Walcott's hierarchization of the standard over the patois.

Mi-Jean: I good just where I am.
 I on my way to the sea
 To become a rich captain,
 The land work too hard.
 Then to become a lawyer.

Old Man: (Softly singing)
On land on sea no man is free,
All meet death, the enemy. I see,
 Hence the net, the net and the book.

Mi-Jean: What?

Old Man: I say hence the book,
 Hence the net, and the book.

Mi-Jean: Ca c'est hence? (What is "hence"?)

Old Man: Same as whereas, and hereunto affixed.
 These are terms used in tautology and law.

Mi-Jean: (Nodding blankly. Pause. Then:)
 I see you have a cow-foot. Ain't that so?

Old Man: Yes, yes. A cow's foot. You have an eye for
 detail!
 Born with it, actually. Source of embarrassment.
 Would you like some tobacco? What are you reading?

Mi-Jean: (Opens the book)
 This book have every knowledge it have;
 I checking up on man with cow-foot, boss,
 In the section call religion, and tropical
 superstition.

Bos...Bovis...Cow...foot...foot, boss? Boss
 foot? Bovis?

Old Man: Outside in the world they are wiser now, Mi-
 Jean;
 They don't believe in evil or the prevalence of
 devils,
 Believe me, philosopher, nobody listens to old

men;

Sit down next to me and have a bit of tobacco.
 And since you need knowledge, I'll give you
 advice...

A reading of this passage shows how language functions as a determinant of character and how one linguistic or theatrical form is always given precedence over the other. Mi-Jean, who speaks in patois throughout the play, is upwardly mobile - he does not want to be a farmer and fancies himself an intellectual. But he is shown to be stupid because of his intellectual arrogance when he has no intellect or deep knowledge to boast about. He relies on books for knowledge, but despite his reading it is the Old Man, speaking in standard, even archaic English - "Hence" the net, the net and the book" - who is able to quote poetry, structure his arguments logically, explain the word "hence" and legitimize/hierarchize his language for being the terminology of educated subjects such as tautology and law. It is no accident either that the reference book Mi-Jean looks to for a definition of a man with a cow-foot has explanations of Latin roots for "cow" and "foot" which have no source, for the Latin from which English derives is original and the fount of all that Mi-Jean strains to learn.

That patois is the expression of a character like Mi-Jean, or the language of the devil when drunk is telling. And lest it be argued that the animals and Ti-Jean himself who are sympathetically portrayed in the play also speak patois, it is important to mark that when there is "sophisticated" thought to be conveyed or a moment theatrically heightened, it is to standard English that the characters turn. Thus the frog,

recounting the poverty of the widow, does so in a lyrical standard English (pp.87-8), and the mother who serves as an archetypal tragic figure in the play and therefore speaks in sombre tones also uses standard English.

The characters of Gros-Jean, Mi-Jean and Ti-Jean have been seen by critics as representing strategies of Caribbean resistance to the burden of colonialism, symbolized by the white planter in the play.³⁸ Syl Lowhar, reviewing a production of the play in Trinidad in 1970 stated, "the three sons represent different generations, different social movements. The first is that of Gros-Jean with all his suppressed rage and muscle power...He is reminiscent of Butler and the rise of free labour in '37...The second is that of Mi-Jean, the intellectual, whose head is always buried in a book. Proud of his brains, "a student of philosophy", he is the typical Afro-Saxon, anxious to display his scholarship." The third is Ti-Jean, "typical we hope of an up-and-coming generation" who overcomes the devil by refusing to observe the rules.³⁹

³⁸ See Albert Ashaolu, "Allegory in Ti-Jean and His Brothers and Victor Questel, "Derek Walcott: Contradiction and Resolution," p.249.

³⁹ Syl Lowhar, "A Struggle for Freedom, Derek Walcott's Ti-Jean, Tapia 8, 9th August 1970. p.6. Lowhar's reading of the play is interesting, for undoubtedly influenced by the events of the Black Power uprising in Trinidad just before the play was produced, she not only sees in Ti-Jean resistance struggles, but in the figure of the mother, a symbol of Africa which has to die if the bolom is to be born. Her reading, whether one accepts her interpretations or not, points to the variety of political allegory Ti-Jean has been able to generate.

There can be no doubt that West Indian history was on Walcott's mind when he wrote the play in New York. He was en route to consult with Tyrone Guthrie who was in Canada regarding the production of Drums and Colours which he had been commissioned to write for the West Indian Federation celebrations in April 1958, and the history of "discovery", exploitation and resistance in the Caribbean he had dramatized in Drums must have impinged on his mind when writing Ti-Jean. There is certainly in the figure of the Bolom who, strangled at birth symbolizes thwarted aspirations of national identity, but who comes to life in the play, echoes of hope which surrounded the West Indian Federation. Moreover, the guise of the devil as a white planter forces a colonial allegory on the play that cannot be ignored.

And yet, when one reads the play closely it becomes clear that the text does not support the theories of resistance critics have read into it. Mi-Jean for instance is one who strictly adheres to the tenant of "silence" as elaborated in the "Song of Silence" which he sings, which subscribes to the view that "The man who is wise is dumb" and advocates that "the wise man's function/ Is how to shut his ears/ Against riot and ruction". (p.123) It is clear from this that Mi-Jean would never be a part of any resistance struggle, even in terms of an intellectual response in a movement of decolonization, against the establishment. He is rather the Macaulayan colonial, one who is keen to learn from the colonizer-devil rather than depose

him. The mother is again a figure who has bought into the notions and rules of the establishment, and in her god-fearing ways is reminiscent of the village women in Sea at Dauphin. She is always cautious and despite her acknowledgement of the planter as an agent of oppression, accepts her fate resignedly as divine will, her attitude eliciting a disparaging response from the devil who describes her as a "poor withered fool who thinks it's holy to be poor".(p.156)

But more importantly, the devil-colonial agent is never defeated in the play. The wager is that the person who gets angry the soonest forfeits his life. Both Gros-Jean and Mi-Jean succumb to the aggravations and racism of the planter-devil. The planter orders them to tie up a goat who constantly escapes, and count the innumerable leaves of cane in the field. He does not allow Gros-Jean the slightest break for a smoke even after two days of hard labour, and refuses to respect his identity and name. Excusing himself with a racist "Can't tell one face from the next out here"(p.111), the planter calls Gros-Jean by many other names but his own. He exacts the same hard labour from Mi-Jean, and aware of the latter's arrogance, shrewdly plays to his ego and pomposity, soon irritating him to the point of anger/death from which there is no escape.

While Gros-Jean and Mi-Jean comply with the devil/planter's orders, Ti-Jean refuses to obey him. As Ti-Jean takes leave of his mother and sets off to meet the devil, we see that he has a

close rapport with the creatures of the forest. This is in contrast to the devil who does not enjoy such relationships and grieves for it - the Old Man moans, "Some people find me ugly, monstrously ugly. Even the smallest insects sometimes. The snake moves from me, and this makes me sad."(p.138) What this indicates is that Ti-Jean is in harmony with his surroundings and that "nature" as it were, will support him in his endeavors. The bird in fact keeps watch for the devil and when Ti-Jean appears on the brink of defeat, his mother dead and the devil rescinding on his promises, it is the frog who gives him encouragement with "Sing, Ti-Jean, sing! Show him you could win!/ Show him what a man is!" (p.162)

With such support Ti-Jean shows a pluckiness and courage his brothers who were arrogant and dismissive of the creatures lacked. Instead of tying up the goat he castrates it and when ordered to count the cane, announces himself the new foreman and has the plantation burnt - an act slave labour resorted to many times. His property destroyed, the devil/planter is furious, but refuses to honour his wager however, for as he declares, "I never keep bargains."(p.158) Ultimately the devil gives the Bolom life, although even this act is qualified with the reiteration of the threat that "The features will change, but the fight is still on" (p.164), but cannot or does not give back what Ti-Jean asks for in the first place - the lives of his mother and brothers. Ti-Jean's "victory" if it is one, is indeed hollow.

Both Sea at Dauphin and Ti-Jean and His Brothers are plays which have great revolutionary potential. In Dauphin however it is a potential which is unfulfilled because of Walcott's own lack of commitment to rupture. Afa is a character who steps out of his skin as it were to make a challenge against the forces that oppress Dauphin, but Walcott makes him recant, and that recantation allows Walcott to efface conflict so that Dauphin ends not with a schism which may usher a new beginning, but with the reiteration of a tragic cycle.

In Ti-Jean and His Brothers, Walcott was exploring and giving an account of West Indian history employing the traditional "trickster" figure common in Caribbean folklore. For Ti-Jean, like the trickster, refuses to play by the rules and resorts instead to subverting the Devil's authority by cunning and irreverent contempt for his power. It is true however that as Ti-Jean **does not get angry**, he does not radically challenge the Devil's authority in the play. Ti-Jean dramatizes effectively that anger means conflict, and conflict on **unequal** terms, given the Devil's power over everyone else. Both Gros-Jean and Mi-Jean die for having lost their temper and for protesting against oppressive labour conditions and the denigration of their identity. Ti-Jean does not lose his temper, and although Walcott does not show him to win over the Devil either, there is ultimately at the end of the play, a positive note. For Ti-Jean at least lives to fight another day, and the

Bolom has been given life. The continuing presence of the Devil mars the prospects for the Bolom's future, but what Walcott presents is a realistic scenario in which the Imperial power continues to dominate the colony even after Independence.

CHAPTER 8

DREAM AS METAPHOR: THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY INDREAM ON MONKEY MOUNTAIN

Dream on Monkey Mountain¹ is one of Walcott's most ambitious plays to-date both in dramatic scope and subject. The staging of it involves a large cast by Walcott's standards, of seven principal characters, an apparition of a white woman, conteur/narrator, chorus, litter bearers, groups of women such as the sisters of the revelation, market women and Makak's wives, and Basil, a Baron Samedi figure of death who has his roots in voodoo ritual. The literary and theatrical traditions within the play are diverse. Strindberg's Dream comes to mind particularly in Walcott's introduction, Genet's The Blacks resonates in the apotheosis scene (Part 2, Scene 3) which calls for an affirmation of "black" identity, the Makak-Moustique relationship echoes that of Cervantes's Quixote-Sancho Panza, and shades of The Tempest can be seen in Makak's Calibanesque closeness to nature particularly in Part 2 Scene 2. And of course, the influence of Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks pervades, specially in the way Fanon's study of the impact of colonialism on the black man's psycho-sexual identity impinges on Walcott's dramatization of the problematic of West Indian

¹ Derek Walcott, Dream on Monkey Mountain in Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972). Pagination hereafter will be from this edition.

identity in the play. It is an influence Walcott acknowledges directly, when he has Moustique accuse the people of being "black faces, white masks!" (p.271)²

The theatrical traditions within the play range from the burlesque court scene in the prologue with chorus and miming characters, to African drumming, dancing and bongo singing, stylized dancing in the healing scene³, and exorcism ritual as Moustique dies. Walcott wanted the folk elements of mime, narration, dance and song to be sparse and stylized as in the Noh and Kabuki theatre, essentialized to reflect the bareness of West Indian life.⁴ But as he was writing the play, exuberant elements of dance, chorus singing and mime which, to Walcott, were the strengths of West Indian cultural traditions had taken over. The playwright commented later that "The play is probably a little overwritten."⁵

The stage setting and opening of Dream significantly highlight three images which have resonance throughout the play.

² For a discussion of the references and allusions in Dream to George Buchner's Woyzeck, Genet's Our Lady of the Flowers, The Balcony and The Blacks, Alejo Carpentier's "The Lost Steps", and Walcott's own plays Ione and Malcochon, see Victor Questel, "Dream on Monkey Mountain: In Perspective," Tapia 4, nos., 35, 36, 37 & 39., September 1974.

³ This dance sequence was choreographed by Beryl MacBurnie.

⁴ Derek Walcott, "Meanings," Savacou 2, September 1970. p.48.

⁵ Quoted in Sharon Ciccarelli, "Reflections Before and After Carnival: An Interview with Derek Walcott," in Charts of Saints (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1979), p.299.

There is a spotlight on an African drum, stressing the West Indian/African connections of the play. Dominating the stage is a large disc of the moon which serves as a complex central symbol. Makak associates his white woman with this moon, for she encompasses the qualities it stands for - the white world, spirituality and beauty. He sees her moreover on full moon nights. The full moon also gives credence to Makak's spells of lunacy, so that the image serves as a symbol of beauty and inspiration which also induces Makak to madness. Finally there is the figure of death, Basil, who weaves in and out of scenes, infusing them with an eeriness which underscores the dream aspect of the play. African drummer, dancer and the figure of Basil who rises to touch the disc of the moon come together, moving "sinuously, with a spidery motion" to a lament which is at once visually arresting and disquieting, setting the tone for a tragic, at times harrowing play.

The dream itself in Dream on Monkey Mountain functions as a structural device and thematic metaphor which permits Walcott considerable creative flexibility. He states in the Production Note that "The play is a dream, one that exists as much in the given minds of its principal characters as that of its writer, and as such, it is illogical, derivative, contradictory." It enables Walcott to shift locale without explanation, make an inarticulate Makak who has no programme or strategy for alleviating his own suffering a near-legendary healer and leader, "resurrect" Lestrade at the end of Part 2 Scene 1, and

explore facets of Makak's psyche through four other characters - Lestrade, Moustique, Tigre and Souris- who function as his alter-egos.

Makak's hallucination on a full moon night on Monkey Mountain in which he is seduced by a white woman, is set within the play itself. It is a vision through which Walcott dramatizes the problematic of black colonial identity, and therefore the exploitation and manipulation inherent in colonial history, and the West Indian's agenda to escape the burden of this history. As Walcott stated, "It is essentially one metaphor with many components."⁶

For Walcott, the figure of the sixty year old woodcutter, Makak, "represented the most isolated, most reduced, race-containing symbol."⁷ "Race-containing" because Makak's destitution and despair embodied, for Walcott, that of the West Indies itself, and therefore its people, poverty-stricken and deprived, whose history of subjugation has created a folklore lacking in heroic warrior figures⁸, and who have suffered

⁶ Quoted in Sharon Ciccarelli, "Reflections Before and After Carnival," p.299.

⁷ Derek Walcott, "Meanings," Savacou 2, September 1970.p.48.

⁸ Walcott stated, "In the West Indies...the slaves kept the strength of the stories about devils and gods and the cunning of certain figures, but what was missing in the folklore was a single heroic warrior figure. My Makak comes from my own childhood. But there was no king, no tribal chief, no warrior for a model in those stories. So the person I saw was this degraded, humble, lonely, isolated figure of the woodcutter." "Meanings," p.50.

centuries of denigration. Makak's physical appearance itself marks these privations. He is old and bent, with nothing but a jute sack around his shoulders, and is mad and suffers from epilepsy.

It is the assault by the colonizer on the black colonial's identity that Walcott sets out to dramatize, and does uncompromisingly and effectively in the play. The immediate agent of Makak's oppression is the mulatto Corporal Lestrade who, as an official of the colonial government, arrested the old man on market Saturday for allegedly having smashed Felicien Alcindor's café, and, in Lestrade's words, urged "the... villagers to join him in sedition and the defilement of the flag...destruction on Church and State, claiming that he was the direct descendant of African kings, a healer of leprosy and the Saviour of his race."(p.225)

Lestrade is, in the play, a harsh caricature of the educated colonial who becomes, as Tigre describes him, "a foot-licking servant of marble law".(p.283) He valorizes everything that has to do with the coloniser and is therefore, white, and has contempt for his fellow black countrymen. For him, Makak, Tigre, Souris are savages who have not proceeded beyond apehood on the evolutionary ladder (hence the appositeness of the name Makak, or monkey), a point from which he himself has, happily, progressed, being culturally and officially nearer his imperial master and mentor. He is typical of the colonial Frantz Fanon

described in Black Skin White Masks as one who "is educated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards...(the one who) becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle."⁹

Lestrade's mulatto complexion would be a significant marker then for the audience in terms of locating him. It would symbolize the dialectic that the assimilated, Macaulayan colonial is caught in. On the one hand it is a complexion which underscores Fanon's thesis to an audience aware that historically, mulattoes have, by virtue of their light colour, enjoyed higher social status than blacks. But because of it, they have also been always subordinate to the whites. It is precisely because his mulatto blood prevents Lestrade from being fully white that he is shown to hate the black part of himself, transferring his bitterness onto those like Makak. He admits this when forced by Basil to repent for his past "sins" as a colonial agent. Of Africa, his "black self", he states, "I jeered thee because I hated half of myself, my eclipse." (p.299)

Walcott is also able to comment, through Lestrade, on a politics of manipulation in which one's **own** countrymen function as neo-colonial agents, oppressing those like Makak. Lestrade is a consummate politician and survivor. He does everything to make

⁹ Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks trns. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1967), p.18.

sure that his master's interests, which he ensures are also his own, are met, and this is true both in a colonial situation and a post-colonial one. In Part 2 of the play, as Makak journeys in his mind to Africa, believing himself an African king, Lestrade is there to continue his former role as an agent of authority. This time round however, he espouses the worth of all things "black", and is shown to be not a lackey, or one exercising the authority of a petty official, but a powerful neo-colonial agent who manipulates Makak, and in a reverse racism informed wholly by the need for revenge, calls for the extermination of all that is white.

Lestrade's weapon of oppression in Part 1 is language, for it is with the use of highly jargonized, "legalese" English that he chooses to impress, humiliate and impose his power upon Makak, as he reads out the legal charges against him and carries the case for the prosecution. Walcott makes an ironic comment on imperial realities, for here is the use of verbose legal jargon to serve sentence on a native defendant who does not even understand the language. But Lestrade is aware of the power of his "command" of English, and eager to impress. As Fanon stated, "Mastery of (the colonial) language affords remarkable power."¹⁰ The colonial who learns the colonizer's tongue both imbibes the latter's values as the language carries the culture, and because of it, becomes part of the colonial establishment, much to the envy of those less fluent in the colonizer's ways. Tigre almost

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, p.18.

gasps, "How a man like that can know so much law? Could know so much language?" (p.220) And although the corporal's malapropisms and verbal pyrotechnics are clearly devices with which Walcott caricatures him, and are therefore comic, precisely because they are not understood as such by Makak, Lestrade's language has the power to humiliate and make the old man nervous to the point of amnesia.

Thus when asked by Lestrade as to what his name is, Makak replies "I forget". When asked what his race is, the old man replies, "I am tired." (p.219) For not only is he, Makak, physically tired after a disoriented night, but as a representative of his race, also weary of the constant humiliation suffered at the hands of colonial agents like Lestrade. Lestrade sums up triumphantly for the far from impartial judges. "My lords, as you can see, this is a being without a mind, a will, a name, a tribe of its own...I will spare you the sound of that voice, which have come from a cave of darkness, dripping with horror. These hands are the hands of Esau, the fingers are like roots, the arteries as hard as twine, and the palms are seamed with coal. But the animal, you observe, is tamed and obedient. Walk round the cage. Marchez! Marchez! (p.222)

As Makak struts around to Lestrade's commands, without even a whimper of protest, so much so that the chorus comments, "I don't know what to say this monkey won't do" (p.222), he is the

colonized subject manipulated by a system geared to exploiting him, but one who **accepts** his subjugation nevertheless. Jean Paul Sartre wrote, "The status of "native" is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonised people **with their consent.**"(my emphasis) That Walcott quotes this as a preface to Part 2 of the play indicates his agreement with Sartre's notion of the colonized subject's complicity in his own subjugation. Sartre was of course responding to Fanon's thesis in Black Skin White Masks and The Wretched of the Earth, of the native whose cultural colonization is so complete that, having accepted the inferiority of his indigenous traditions, he accepts unquestioningly the superiority of the colonizer's values. He even feels beholden to the colonizer for having rescued him from primitiveness. Lestrade is such a colonial. Chastising Makak who attempts to escape jail by bribing him, the corporal declares, "This ain't the bush. This ain't Africa. This is not another easy-going nigger you talk to, but an officer! A servant and an officer of the law! Not the law of the jungle, but something the white man teach you to be **thankful** for". (my emphasis, p.280)

The colonial Fanon spoke of, like Lestrade, is however a native bourgeoisie, educated and therefore inseminated with the colonizer's values. Makak on the other hand is an illiterate peasant who submits to colonial authority not because he appreciates it but because he is weary of years of oppression. Lestrade himself realizes this. Of his black countrymen he

declares, "I would like to see them challenge the law, to show me they alive. But they paralyse with darkness. They paralyse with faith.¹¹ They cannot do nothing, because they born slaves and they born tired." (p.261) Walcott has in fact depicted the figures Lestrade longs for before, with Afa and Ti-Jean who stand up to their oppression with defiance. Makak on the other hand is completely defeated by the burden of his history. He is a colonial who is not only broken, but also incoherent, and lacks moreover, an agenda or strategy with which to overcome the exploitative framework as policed by Lestrade and the judges that he is caught in.

Under the influence of his vision in which he is seduced by a white woman however, Makak undergoes a radical transformation. We see this even as he describes his dream, for he rises in stature as he recalls it, and this is theatrically marked by the lifting of the cage in which he was imprisoned. His language moves away from the reduced and monosyllabic to a poetic standard English.

Sirs, I am sixty years old. I have live
 all my life
 Like a wild beast in hiding. Without child,
 without wife.
 People forget me like the mist on Monkey
 Mountain.

¹¹ One notes that in this play too, Walcott takes every opportunity to make digs at the power of the church over those like Makak. In the prologue when Makak is asked his name, race and religion, he brightens up and smiles only when he declares himself a Catholic. (p.219) By marking the role of the Catholic church on these peasants' lives in this manner, Walcott makes clear the irony involved in the discrepancy between the church's duty and the degraded life the peasants endure.

Is thirty years now I have looked in no mirror,
 Not a pool of cold water, when I must drink,
 I stir my hands first, to break up my image.
 I will tell you my dream. Sirs, make a white mist
 In the mind; make that mist hang like a cloth
 From the dress of a woman, on prickles, on branches,
 Make it rise from the earth, like the breath of the
 dead

On resurrection morning, and I walking through it
 On my way to my charcoal pit on the mountain.
 Make the web of the spider heavy with diamonds
 And when my hand brush it, let the chain break.
 I remember, in my mind, the cigale sawing,
 Sawing, sawing wood before the woodcutter,
 The drum of the bull-frog, the blackbird flute,
 And this old man walking, ugly as sin,
 In a confusion of vapour,
 Till I feel I was God self, walking through cloud.
 In the heaven on my mind. Then I hear this song.
 Not the blackbird flute,
 Not the bull-frog drum,
 Not the whistling of parrots
 As I brush through the branches, shaking the dew,
 A man swimming through smoke,
 And the bandage of fog unpeeling my eyes,
 As I reach to this spot,
 I see this woman singing
 And my feet grow roots. I could move no more.
 A million silver needles prickles my blood,
 Like a rain of small fishes.
 The snakes in my hair speak to one another,
 The smoke mouth open, and I behold this woman,
 The loveliest thing I see on this earth,
 Like the moon walking along her own road.

(p.227)

Makak is full of self-loathing. Believing in his "inferiority" as a Negro, thinking himself old and ugly, he has avoided looking at his face for thirty years. But his vision energizes him, imbuing him with self-confidence. It is a shift marked by a change from patois to a complex standard idiom¹², and

¹² It is interesting to note that when Makak describes his dream to Moustique (p.235), it is in prose and mainly patois. It is a distinction which marks a hierarchization of audience, for the "blank" verse is aimed at an educated one, while the patois version is directed at Moustique who, functioning as

from past to present tense as he begins to recall his dream, so that for the first time Makak **directs** the pace of events. Images of mist, gossamer cob-web (to which Basil, the Baron Samedi figure of death gives added significance as he is often portrayed as Anancy the spider in Jamaican pantomime), "the breath of the dead/ On resurrection morning" are evoked to heighten the dream-like, mysterious quality of the vision, which also reflect Makak's state of mind as he leaves for the charcoal pit. For he is smoking ganja, and in a "vapour of confusion" or feeling like "God self" and walking on high cloud variously. It is Calibanesque in that Makak is very aware of nature. He hears the noise of the cigale, bull-frog and flute like sound of the black bird singing. The woman's song however, surpasses all these, having the power to transfix him on the spot. The woman herself is the loveliest thing he has ever seen, and the fact that she not only stops but kisses him in his sleep means the ultimate acceptance and affirmation that Makak can ask for. Later, (p.229), he describes a frenzy he gets into which, inspired by the woman, is sexual, orgasmic - the images of boiling blood, brown river in flood and movement of charging, warrior-like, lion-like and faster and faster, carrying the sexual connotations of Makak's fantasy clearly enough.

Makak's alter-ego in the play, is really part of his "native" self. It must be borne in mind however that this distinction is Walcott's own. Nowhere in the play is it indicated that Makak is consciously diglossic, or that he can impress an educated audience with fluent English even if he wants to. Rather, this recollection of the dream and the later healing scene represent those poetic moments in the play which Walcott found necessary to express in a standard idiom.

Fanon declared, "The **anima** of the Antillean Negro is almost always a white woman."¹³ Makak is the kind of black colonial Fanon had in mind when he made that statement, because, denigrated for their blackness, their "flat" features and "primitive" cultures, it is only the white colonizing Other who can, in Fanon's manichean world, give the Makak's of this world worth. And what better pinnacle of acceptance than to be loved by a white woman? Fanon described the dialectic thus:

I wish to be acknowledged not as **black** but **white**. Now - and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged - who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.
I am a white man.¹⁴

Lestrade and Tigre scorn Makak for his fantasy. The Corporal describes it as a vile, ambitious and obscene dream (p.224), while Tigre declares it a fantasy Makak masturbates to in the moonlight. But the fact that Lestrade calls it "ambitious" is significant. He knows only too well the affirmative powers such an intimate relationship with a white woman can bring. And since the white world is, in his view, a superior one, it can only be ambition that presses for the advantage of being loved by a white woman. Lestrade, Souris, Tigre and Moustique may not believe in the reality of Makak making love to a white woman, but it is a dream-fantasy which,

¹³ Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, p.63.

¹⁴ Ibid.

as black colonials, they are all shown to share nevertheless.

The affirmative power of the white woman on Makak manifests itself most effectively in Part 1 Scene 2, when from being an incoherent, tired and broken man, Makak becomes one who forgets his old age and ugliness, a warrior and Christ-like legendary healer, carving out an important social role for himself.

As the scene opens, a man suffering from snake bite is accompanied by sisters of the revelation, engaged in a dirge-like dance. Moustique encounters them first, and at once recognizes a potentially rewarding situation, for he is the exploitative side of Makak, always looking to earn money by whatever means at his disposal. Given the situation in which a sick man is dying, Moustique, realizing that he has a "marketable source" in Makak because of the latter's healing powers, persuades the peasants to appeal to the old man for help, even though he himself is sceptical of what Makak can achieve.

With the central symbol of a burning coal which is applied to the patient to make him sweat, Walcott creates a scene charged with dramatic tension and symbolic meaning. The image of coal is common in Walcott's work. St. Lucia having been a coaling station, in both Another Life and "Meanings", Walcott uses coal as a symbol of bondage.

From the canted barracks of the City of Refuge,
from his grandmother's tea shop, he would watch

on black hills of imported anthracite
 the frieze of coal-black carriers, **charbonniers**,
 erect, repetitive as hieroglyphs
 descending and ascending the steep ramps,
 building the pyramids,
 songs of Egyptian bondage
when they sang,
 the burden of the panniered anthracite,
 one hundredweight to every woman
 tautened, like cable, the hawsers in their necks.
 There was disease inhaled in the coal dust.
 Silicosis. Herring gulls
 white as the uniforms of tally clerks,
 screeching, numbered and tagged the loads.
(Collected Poems, p.171)

In Dream however, coal is a symbol of survival and potential. Like coal, which is organic and formed at high temperatures and pressure, the West Indian too has survived years of deprivation under extreme conditions. Like coal which generates energy, the West Indian has the potential for brilliance. Makak's lines are inspiring:

You are living coals,
 you are trees under pressure,
 you are brilliant diamonds
 In the hand of your God. (p.249)¹⁵

¹⁵ Daniel Izevbaye traces the source of Walcott's coal image to George Herbert's poem "Virtue". Seasoned timber is Herbert's image for integrity and endurance, while coal is the emblem for the end of the world. In Walcott's poem "Verandah" on the other hand, although the seasoned timber survives the fire of Castries, coal becomes not the end, but a symbol of a phoenix-like beginning. See Daniel S. Izevbaye, "The Exile and the Prodigal: Derek Walcott as West Indian Poet," Caribbean Quarterly 26, nos.1 & 2, March-June 1980. pp.77-80. It is interesting to note that Makak's lines closely echo those in "Verandah":

I ripen towards your twilight, sir, that dream
 where I am singed in that sea-crossing, steam
 towards that vaporous world, whose souls,

Like pressured trees, brought diamonds out of coals.
(Collected Poems, p.90)

The faith Makak urges the sick man and peasants to have in themselves does not however come easily to such oppressed people, and this is dramatized in the fact that there is no visible sign of the sick man's recovery. The moment is a tense one. A life is at stake, as is Makak's reputation as a healer. The latter moves away in disillusionment, warning the peasants in a manner resembling Lestrade's - "These niggers too tired to believe anything again. Remember, is you all self that is your own enemy." (p.250) But to the relief of Makak, who is even taken aback and surprised at his powers, and the joy of everyone else, the remedy does work and the invalid sweats out the poison/fever.

This scene is important not just for the dramatic fulfilment of Makak's powers in being able to heal the sick man. It is significant because it also marks the turning point in Makak's life, from idealist to tyrannical politician. For with the recovery of the patient, it is Moustique, Makak's opportunistic alter-ego, who takes over, pressing home his advantage to commercialize Makak's potential. He rejoices as he prepares to exploit Makak's gift to the full. "I see a sick man with snake bite, and a set o'damn asses using old-time medicine" he sneers. "I see a road paved with silver. I see the ocean multiplying with shillings. Thank God." (p.253)

The significance of Moustique's move is in fact underscored when Basil asks him whether he knows where he is. Moustique

replies, "At a crossroads in the moonlight." (p.253) The significance of this would not be lost on the audience, for the crossroads is certainly where Makak is, torn between the side of him which yearns for material gain and that which wants to remain steadfast to the ideals the white woman has inspired in him - ideals Walcott never clarifies and explains as encompassing the means by which Makak and his people can overcome their deprivation, but shows as having the power to heal damaged psyches nevertheless. Basil moreover, refers to the crossroads as a white road with four legs, and Moustique has no difficulty in recognizing the image as representing the white spider, linked to the trickster Anancy, and sinister symbol of death. Basil's evocation is prophetic, for Moustique's heedless charlatanism leads to his death at the hands of angry villagers who, having found out his trickery, stone and club him to death. As to Makak, we see him thereafter degenerating into a man who is, in Tigre's words, "as mad like a ant". (p.293)

It is in Part 2 of the play that we see Makak's split personalities constantly contest each other as he returns, having stabbed Lestrade, to Monkey Mountain. The gentle Makak is still visible. His fastidiousness and abhorrence of violence is evident in his horror at having stabbed Lestrade (p.286), and later in his troubled awareness of tribal wars and internecine killing in Africa. He is at times full of self-doubt and introspection. On Monkey Mountain he is one with nature. It is a place which inspires him, for he has his inspirational dream

there. It is a place where he "can read the palm of every leaf" and "prophecy from one crystal of dew." (p.288) He is master of his environment here and displays a confidence he lacks in alien, urban settings. He stalks the forest like an animal looking for ganja, and tells Tigre and Souris, "I can hear the crack of every leaf. I know all the signals of insects." (p.289) In such harmony is he with his native surroundings that Souris remarks of Makak, "Look at him! Half-man, half-forest, a shadow moving through the leaves." (p.289)

The forest environment of Monkey Mountain functions at one level in the play as a primordial place of origin to which the black native returns in order to retrace his steps and discover his birth-right. Being symbolic of such a womb, Monkey Mountain has associations for Makak of Africa, the mother country from which the West Indian was plucked out by a history of slavery and colonialism.

But by making Makak undertake a symbolic journey in his mind to "Africa", and delineating him, Tigre, Souris and Lestrade moreover as corrupt and ruthless characters while "there", Walcott also forces another dimension which is one of political allegory on the play. The playwright began Dream in 1959 and continued writing it through the 1960s which was a decade in which Africa was increasingly looked to by West Indian intellectuals and politicians as an alternative cultural fount, and in contrast to the European Centre, a continent which

offered many more traditions the West Indian could relate to. As has been shown in Chapter 5, Walcott was disappointed with, and felt threatened by these moves. He was concerned that an obsession with Africa was an escape which denied possibilities of creating and investing in the West Indies itself. But he also felt threatened by the rhetoric of Black Power and "Back to Africa", as it undermined his own cultural values and allegiances which privileged the European, and therefore questioned his own socio-political position in West Indian society.

The forces that led to the Black Power Movement and the Trinidad crisis of 1970 which had begun to gather momentum in the 1960s while he was writing Dream, brought Walcott to crisis. On the one hand he stated of these politicians and their policies, "That there will always be abrupt eruptions of defiance is almost irrelevant itself because the impulse of such eruptions, their political philosophy, remains simplistic and shallow. That all blacks are beautiful is an enervating statement, that all blacks are brothers more a reprimand than a charter, that the people must have power almost their death wish, for the real power of this time is silent."¹⁶ But on the other hand, he felt threatened enough both in terms of the impact of these policies on the larger socio-political context for the West Indies, and his own position as a creative writer-

¹⁶ Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History," Is Massa Day Dead ed. Orde Coombs (New York:Anchor Press & Doubleday Inc., 1974), p.20.

intellectual in that society, to harshly caricature the "African" doctrine and its advocates in a play like Dream.

Makak's outlook on Africa is tinged with the nostalgia that Walcott criticized for being a "romantic darkness" in "Twilight".¹⁷ The old man sees in his mind an Africa of "golden sand, the rivers where lions come down to drink, lapping at the water with their red tongues, then the villages, the birds, the sound of flutes." (p.291) These images are shown however not to coincide with the "reality" of Africa which is barbaric, a continent full of brutal tribal wars and internecine strife.¹⁸ There are times when Makak himself is aware of its horror, and almost unable to bear the burden of his awareness. When Tigre, Makak's most aggressive impulse takes on Lestrade and begins a war dance, circling the latter and threatening death (while Basil, as expected, "waits in the shadows"), Makak is broken by these conflicting alter-egos of his mind who parallel warring African tribes. He cries,

Locked in a dream, and treading their own darkness.
Snarling at their shadows, snapping at their own
tails, devouring their own entrails like the hyena,
eaten with self-hatred. O God, O gods, why did you
give me this burden? (p.305)

For the most part however, Makak is an instigator of such

¹⁷ Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p.8.

¹⁸ While Walcott was writing Dream, the Biafran war was being waged - a conflict that perhaps instigated, and reinforced for him his argument in the play.

violence, an irrational and imperious dictator who appoints Tigre his General because the latter is "a man who knows how to hate, to whom the life of a man is like a mosquito, like a fly." (p.292-3) As Souris boils yams for them in the forest, Makak thunders, "Feed my armies", and gives Tigre orders to prepare his men for war. (pp.294-5) His enemies are however his own people who have rejected his "dream", and consequently fight and squabble amongst themselves. Walcott's play was completed two years after the assassination of Martin Luther King and the latter's famous "I have a dream" speech has resonance here. Dr. King spoke against institutionalized racism in ways oppressed black people all over the world could related to. But he was primarily a pacifist and compromiser from whom militant groups like The Black Panthers and Black Power, which espoused a retaliatory violence Walcott found unacceptable broke away. It is tempting then to see in the figures of Tigre and Lestrade who forsake the "idealist" Makak, parallels to what happened in the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.A.

But instead of appealing to his people in the pacifist terms of his own "vision", Makak also reacts, paradoxically, like a ruthless dictator who cannot stomach rejection and criticism. He declares, "I have brought a dream to my people, and they rejected me. Now they must be taught, even tortured, killed. Their skulls will hang from my palaces. I will break up their tribes." (p.301)

Walcott's purpose in the play was to warn against undigested romantic and idyllic notions of Africa which, it was his burden to show, were not only untenable but also inappropriate and retrogressive when used as an alternative model to the West Indies. In this, his task was similar to that in O Babylon! in which he questioned the images of a glorious and inspiring "Zion", subscribed to as an alternative to a corrupt and oppressive "Babylon" by the Rastafari. But by pointing in Dream to the fallacy of an untainted Africa through a trivializing of the continent and its conflicts, and savagely caricaturing its leaders through Makak, Lestrade, Tigre and Souris, Walcott was himself being unacceptably biased and only proving his total aversion to the continent and, by implication, his African heritage.

It is in Part 2 Scene 3, the "apotheosis scene", that Walcott's satire is harshest. The spokesman of "Black Power" and "Back to Africa" are presented through the deified Makak and his court in the most primitivist terms. "Masks of **barbarous** gods appear to a **clamour** of drums, sticks, the chant of tribal triumph" (my emphasis, p.308) before Makak enters, and we can see at once in the adjectives of Walcott's stage direction, that the odds are stacked against Africa and its tribal kingdoms. Tigre and Lestrade's internecine battle was similarly dramatized in savage terms, through a dance in which the antagonists circle each other, snarling, the Corporal with a spear. (pp.305-6) This would be a theatrically exciting moment, but in keeping with the

images of primitive, cannibal Africa disseminated by the coloniser. It is also totally out of keeping with the times the play was written in - the Biafran war was fought for instance with sophisticated weaponry.

In the apotheosis scene, Lestrade functions as the Inquisitor at Makak's court with absolute power. He declares,

Wives, warriors, chieftains! The law takes no sides, it changes the complexion of things. History is without pardon, justice hawk-swift, but mercy everlasting. We have prisoners and traitors, and they must be judged swiftly. The law of a country is the law of that country. Roman law, my friends, is not tribal law. Tribal law, in conclusion, is not Roman law. Therefore, wherever we are, let us have justice. We have no time for patient reforms. Mindless as the hawk, impetuous as lions, as dried of compassion as the bowels of a jackal. Elsewhere the swiftness of justice is barbarously slow, but our progress cannot stop to think.

(p.311)

Walcott's purpose may have been to caricature Lestrade for being ever the agent of authority who revels in jargon and word-play. But this is to blur Walcott's complicity with what is actually being said. Roman/European law is patient and considered; tribal African law on the other hand is impulsive, mindless and "dried of compassion as the bowels of a jackal". Lestrade's comment on the tribal system he is part of, and even controls, is apt. It is a system on the march in which "progress cannot stop to think."

Why does a character like Lestrade, an advocate of black culture and power, renounce his own value-system in this manner?

If Walcott's purpose was to caricature him as a stupid buffoon who cannot even grasp the fact that he denounces himself each time he tries to be clever, this is not what comes across in the play. For what Lestrade has to say about Africa and its law is not a joke, or the confusion of a stupid man, but is expressed as true, and we see this played out in the most bizarre fashion as Makak's court passes judgement on those who are white.

The affirmation of black culture and identity Makak's court subscribes to requires, according to Lestrade's argument, a rejection of all that is white even if it means the annihilation of what is enriching and worthwhile. Walcott stated in "Twilight" that "the manic absurdity would be to give up thought because it is white"¹⁹, and this is exactly what is played out in this scene. Basil reads out the list of "criminals" and the very fact that he does so, signifies for us that the defendants are condemned to die even before the case against them can be heard. Basil's role here is in fact totally out of keeping with his character in the rest of the play in which he functioned as a mysterious and awesome figure of death who had the power to frighten both Moustique and Lestrade. For as he reads the list he comes across, like Lestrade, as a pillar of pompous officialdom who does his master's bidding and reads by rote.

Those condemned to death are bastions of Western culture,

¹⁹ Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," in Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 31.

ranging from literary giants such as Shakespeare and Marlowe, to scientists and philosophers like Galileo, Copernicus and Plato; from explorers and navigators like Cecil Rhodes, John Hawkins and Francis Drake to humanitarians like Florence Nightingale. In effect, these names mark the stages of a great civilization and the "rubber stamp" - "unanimous negative" in this case - court of Makak which blithely condemns them to death/oblivion, is engaged in a self-destructive denial of human knowledge and culture.

The rhetoric of absolutes that Makak's court subscribes to echoes that of Othello's in Walcott's poem "Goats and Monkeys".

Virgin and ape, maid and malevolent Moore,
 their immortal coupling still halves our world.
 He is your sacrificial beast, bellowing, goaded,
 a black bull snarled in ribbons of its blood.
 And yet, whatever fury girded
 on that saffron-sunset turban, moon-shaped sword
 was not his racial, panther-black revenge
 pulsing her chamber with raw musk, its sweat,
 but horror of the moon's change,
 of the corruption of an absolute,
 like a white fruit
 pulped ripe by fondling but doubly sweet.

And so he barbarously arraigns the moon
 for all she has beheld since time began..

(Collected Poems, p.84)

Walcott's Othello does not kill Desdemona out of racial jealousy. Her crime is not that she is white, but that her "infidelity" blots or corrupts the absolute image Othello has of her as a woman who symbolizes a warm humanity and fragility. The irony of course is that Desdemona is not false, but Othello, absorbed in his intellectual absolutes cannot see that, and has to "barbarously arraign the moon", for although it once was a

symbol of Desdemona's purity, it now spells "the pure corruption in her dreaming face".

In the context of Dream, the quest for an independent identity requires Makak to destroy the white woman together with all the other bastions of "white" civilization. Although his tone is one of weariness in this scene, for he is exhausted by his inspirational vision which has, in this African setting, turned into a nightmare, he takes on the moral responsibility of killing the woman himself, and, exclaiming "Now, O God, now I am free" he beheads her. (p.320)

Lloyd Brown stated in an article entitled "The Revolutionary Dream of Walcott's Makak" that in "destroying an allegiance (to the white world) that saps his revolutionary potential" Makak regains his physical and spiritual freedom. Brown stated, "at the end of his dream Makak expresses a triumphant sense of his own humanity...So that when he is released from prison the regaining of physical freedom is analogous to a birth, to revolutionary beginnings for Makak and his people."²⁰ It is significant that the first reference to Makak's real name - Felix Hobain - is to be found only in the epilogue, after the beheading of his white woman. And Walcott himself stated in an interview with Ric Mentus, "The ultimate message in Dream...is for us to shed the African longing, and to

²⁰ Lloyd Brown, "The Revolutionary Dream of Walcott's Makak," Critics on Caribbean Literature ed. Edward Baugh (London:George Allen & Unwin,1978),p.59.

say that we are here...The whole cycle of Makak's experience is that he makes the journey (to Africa) but when he returns, the idea is that he repossesses, or for the first time, has a feeling of possessing where he belongs - where he has been found."²¹

It is my contention however that the play does not end on such positive, clearly defined terms. Makak is weary and exhausted after a disoriented night in which his vision turned into a nightmare. He lapses into describing himself as an old and ugly man again, and he does not even have his wits about him. He needs to ask Lestrade why he is in jail and which day of the week it is. He still retains bits of his dream for he asks for General Tigre and General Rat. Moustique who enters the prison to bail Makak out has to make excuses for the old man on the grounds that he suffers from fits on full moon nights and is one who "don't know why he born, why he suffer." (p.325) And even Makak's grounding in his native environment that Walcott spoke of is ambiguous. Moustique echoes Walcott's statement to Ric Mentus when he tells Lestrade that Makak "belong right here." But the Corporal replies, "Here is a prison. Our life is a prison." (p.325) There is no positive that has been achieved then by the end of the play, and Makak still remains a confused old man, looking forward to "a green beginning" on the one hand, but yearning to be "swallowed up in mist again" and forgotten on the

²¹ Quoted in Diana Lyn, "The Concept of the Mulatto in some works of Derek Walcott," Caribbean Quarterly 26, nos.1 & 2, March-June 1980. p.62.

other.

This reality of the end comes in fact as no surprise, for it is an end which is predicated by Walcott's attitude to the quest for collective and individual identity throughout the play. In the final analysis, not one of the characters in the play is presented as being able to think of, let alone forge, a new order to overcome the deprivations of their lives. Makak is a confused, schizophrenic man who lacks confidence and has no coherent and viable agenda for challenging the exploitative system he is caught up in. When, inspired by his white woman, he does gain confidence, he is shown, except in the healing scene, to be (in the African setting) ruthless and barbaric, with alternating moments of introspection and exhaustion. He is moreover, presented in the most primitivist terms, as the "King of Limpopo, eye of Zambezi" (p.308), surrounded by warriors and harem. Makak may, moreover, think of himself as somehow different from the rest, but in not following through/clarifying what his vision really means or demands in concrete terms, Walcott does not permit him an articulation of a serious alternative to prevailing injustice.

Nor can we take Makak's opportunistic alter-ego Moustique seriously, for he is a charlatan and cannot be trusted. His name Moustique - mosquito - is in fact apposite, for he is a parasite who, despite his own scepticism of Makak's power, markets his friend as a great healer. His is a stance which indicates utter

contempt for the people whom he in fact calls "children of darkness" (p.267), and in the way he is presented, as a pragmatic but fraudulent clown, a foil to Makak's idealism and sincerity, we know that Moustique could not have a credible revolutionary agenda either.

Tigre represents Makak's most aggressive impulse and is impatient, selfish and crude. The first images we have of him and Souris are as two half-naked felons, squabbling, animal-like in keeping with their names, engaged in an "Inchoate, animal howling, leaping and pacing" - all this for a drink of rum. (p.216) Walcott told Sharon Ciccarelli that "When, like in a fable, a character is given an animal's name, like Tigre or Souris, or Makak, he becomes akin to the mythical figure. An animal becomes a man, a man becomes an animal. So that what I am doing is broadening or clarifying, the kind of common folk imagination that ascribes an animal's characteristic to a person."²² The animal world in fables which reflects the human one has heroes who are able to defeat evil however, whereas in Walcott's tale, his men remain at the level of the bestial, with no mitigating characteristics.

Given such characters, what is there to make the political allegory in Part 2 of the play plausible? The Messiahs of Black Power at Makak's court cannot be taken seriously. Nor is their

²² Quoted in Sharon Ciccarelli, "Reflections Before and After Carnival: An Interview with Derek Walcott," p.304.

philosophy as depicted in the play, a realistic representation of the politics of black power that were going on in the U.S.A. and the Caribbean in the 1960s. The statement by Stokely Carmichael quoted below comes close perhaps to the rhetoric Walcott reacted against:

I'm a political activist, and I don't deal with the individual. I think it's a cop-out when people talk about the individual. What we're talking about around the U.S. today, and I believe around the Third World is the system of international white supremacy coupled with international capitalism. And we're out to smash that system. And people who see themselves as part of that system are going to be smashed with it...or we're going to be smashed.²³

There is, symptomatically, no distinction made by Carmichael that operating capitalist structures in the U.S. and Europe are policed by people who only **happen** to be white. But Carmichael was also pointing to a larger-than-personal system which discriminates against black people and, through multinational corporations and aid agencies, keeps the Third World in check. When Basil reads a list comprising bastions of **culture**, which condemns even a man like William Wilberforce, whose abolition bill saw the freedom from slavery, what is effaced is the reality of contemporary exploitation in which a black wo/man is caught.

It is significant that Felicien Alcindor whose café Makak

²³ Stokely Carmichael, "Black Power," The Dialectics of Liberation ed. David Cooper (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.150.

attacked, does not figure in the play except by way of mention in the prologue when Lestrade reads out the charges against Makak. Alcindor buys Makak's coal and is therefore his economic "benefactor", but there is no link forged by Walcott between Alcindor's obvious power over Makak, and the old man's rampage in the café. Moustique excuses his friend's violence on the grounds that "a man can take no more" (p.325), but in not dramatizing Makak's protest against the system that Alcindor and Lestrade represent, in derisively emphasizing rather the politics of Black Power, Walcott loads the dice against the colonized subject as effective rebel.

What is offered in Dream on Monkey Mountain is the possibility, in Sartrean terms, of beginning afresh, with self-knowledge once the demons of history have been extinguished. Sartre stated of the black man,

He must indeed breach the walls of the culture-prison, and he must indeed, one day, return to Africa. Thus with the apostles of négritude, indissolubly fused are the theme of the return to the native land and that of the redescent into the bursting Hell of the black soul. It is in the nature of a systematic quest, a divestment and an asceticism which accompanies a continuous effort toward penetration. And I shall name this poetry "orphyic" because this untiring descent of the Negro into himself causes me to think of Orpheus going to claim Eurycide (sic) from Pluto.²⁴

For Walcott, such a "return journey with all its horror of rediscovery, means the annihilation of what is known."

²⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, Black Orpheus trns.S.W.Allen (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1963), pp.20-1.

(Twilight, p.26) Having got **beyond** history in this manner, the West Indian would be able to possess the Caribbean landscape for the first time and have a sense of belonging to the environment. Thus Walcott asked in Another Life,

Where else to row, but backward?
Beyond origins, to the whale's wash,
to the epicantthic Arawak's Hewanora,
back to the impeachable pastoral,
Praying the salt scales would flake
 from our eyes
(Collected Poems, p.217)

In Dream on Monkey Mountain, such a return to the Caribbean landscape is dramatized in terms of a Calibanesque return to nature as Makak walks towards Monkey Mountain. But as my discussion of the play has shown, the tentative ending of Dream implies that it is a return which by no means assures us that Makak possesses the land. In this lies perhaps, the strength of the play. For ultimately it is more realistic as it enacts the fact that the West Indian's quest for identity is fraught with conflict, contradiction, ambiguity and tragedy, given the cultural, economic and socio-political paradigms the post-colonial world inhabits today.

I hope to have established in this second part of the dissertation, the fact that Derek Walcott is a playwright who

is constantly and overtly engaged in a dialogue with his personal and larger colonial histories, and that throughout his work, from his first major play Henri Christophe (1949/50) to Dream on Monkey Mountain and the essays on history written twenty years later, is a reiteration of his central concerns regarding the nexus of history and identity in the West Indies.

It was indicated that the violent and deracinated history of the West Indies and its current economic dispossession, have caused many of its intellectuals, writers and activists to seek to construct for themselves cohesive and "wholesome" identities which would efface their sense of alienation and underprivilege. While activists of the Black Power movement looked for a shift in the locus of power from Euro-American conglomerates to the urban and rural black proletariat, and elicited support for their programme by emphasizing their *négritude* and possibilities of a black internationale, a writer like Brathwaite turned to a cultural rehabilitation of the African legacies in the Caribbean, and the creole language as one better suited to carry the Caribbean experience. Walcott's essays on history were read against these agendas, and it was shown that the playwright's hostility to them emanated as much from his personal class and racial positions as his wider concerns regarding their rhetoric of absolutes, and marginalization or discrimination of other cultural alternatives and possibilities in the West Indies.

Although Walcott argues for syncretism and multi-

culturalism as the essence of the Caribbean, his own cultural interests led him however to emphasize an European/Western frame of reference, exemplified in his choice of the **Muse** of history and the figure of Crusoe, over Caliban, Ariel or the creole of popular culture. But Walcott is a contradictory writer, and the anomalies between his constructions of identity in his public roles as writer-intellectual and journalist, when he states for instance that the safest route for the West Indian artist is imitation of what is accepted abroad, (see page 201), and his own efforts as a creative writer who works towards a syncretic language, (although my discussion of the language in Ti-Jean and His Brothers demonstrated that syncretism does not mean a free-floating hybridity as one form always dominates the other), are many. These contradictions are to be read however not as inconsistencies of a mediocre writer but as those which point yet again to the contradictory world the post-colonial inhabits, and the source of Walcott's creative angst which, when made use of creatively by the playwright, charges his work with dynamism.

The contradictions within Walcott's work also point to a West Indian history radically different to the West African one of Wole Soyinka's. In re-articulating his identity, Soyinka had recourse to a relatively cohesive Yoruba culture out of which he was able to construct mythic and artistic paradigms to posit as an alter/native tradition to the coloniser's. Walcott on the other hand, victim of a far more deracinated saga, felt he had no such "native" tradition to recoup. His use of the Crusoe

story as a paradigm for the West Indian experience forwards the view in fact, that the West Indies lacked a tradition before the advent of the coloniser, for Crusoe's island is uninhabited, one without metaphors. This also points to the problematic a post-colonial like Walcott inhabits, challenging the coloniser's impositions of identity through an Adamic endeavour which is, however, implicated in the coloniser's own discourse. For Walcott has complicity in the dispossession of the Caribbean here as he internalizes and accepts the coloniser's version of a virgin Caribbean territory.

Moreover, for Walcott who writes in a region distinct for its cultural mixing and cosmopolitanness, and thus far more disparate than Soyinka's Yoruba society, the construction of any singular, given West Indian identity is problematic, as it inevitably marginalizes other traditions within the Caribbean. Thus even in Walcott's most "syncretic" works such as Sea at Dauphin, Ti-Jean and His Brothers and The Joker of Seville, African and Anglo-French, or Creole and Spanish traditions are combined, but those of the East Indian are left out except for the inclusion of a character like Hounakin in Dauphin.

Walcott is a playwright who is concerned above all that the history of the Caribbean, despite its violence, should be looked at by his people as an enabling one, and warns his audience therefore against a reading of history in absolute terms, and in a way which would lead to a quest for revenge which, in the

context of the West Indies, would inevitably be articulated on racial lines. This is Walcott's message from Henri Christophe through to Dream on Monkey Mountain and "The Muse of History", and one which points to a fundamental insight on Walcott's part that such absolutes militate against post-coloniality itself as it is constituted by contradictory matrices, and therefore an outlook which denies the complexity of the post-colonial experience.

CONCLUDING NOTE

It was asserted at the outset that Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott are two playwrights who, when taken together, provide important case studies of the post-colonial's re-articulation of identity, because they present overtly polarized alternatives which are however, less divergent than they appear. On the one hand, their strategies for re-articulation are radically different, rooted as they are in respective West African and St. Lucian colonial experiences and the playwrights' personal histories. Soyinka had recourse to a viable indigenous Yoruba culture which he was able to posit as an alter/native tradition to the coloniser's, whereas the epistemic violence that took place in the Caribbean left Walcott with no such native tradition that could be easily recouped. But on the other, as my discussions of Myth, Literature and the African World and Walcott's essays on history and the "Figure of Crusoe" have shown, both playwrights re-articulate and construct identities from **within** the coloniser's own discourse, using the references and paradigms of the European centre. Their works then become sites which reflect the contradictions that constitute post-coloniality itself.

It is important to note that other alternatives in re-articulating identity have been tried, and I will briefly refer to the position of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In Decolonising the Mind,

Ngugi declared his intention not to write in English again. He stated,

This book, Decolonising the Mind, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way.¹

For Ngugi, the decision not to write in English is a political one. He wrote, "The question of audience settled the problem of language choice; and the language choice settled the question of audience."² Aware above all of the inimical forces operating in neo-colonial societies today, of which political oppression in Kenya is part, writing in English became untenable for Ngugi who was concerned with addressing a wider audience encompassing not middle-class elites but peasants, with messages that would rouse their political consciousness and enable them to struggle against the forces of their oppression. But Ngugi is also aware of the power of English as a language which, like all languages, carry culture, and therefore the values of its native speakers - in this case, those of the coloniser. English for Ngugi then, is a language which has constructed his very identity and which functions moreover as a marker of privilege. His decision to leave it for the purposes of his writing therefore is also a de-colonizing project. He stated, "I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles

¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind (London: James Currey, 1986), p.xiv.

² Ibid., p.44.

of Kenyan and African peoples.³

Describing Decolonising the Mind, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin wrote in The Empire Writes Back that it presents

The most cogent and powerful account advocating the need to "decolonize" cultures, including the return to writing in pre-colonial languages. An essential text in the debate which has emerged on these issues in many post-colonial societies.⁴

Ashcroft et. al. are generous in their praise of Ngugi's persuasive powers in his book. But attention needs to be drawn to their reading of Ngugi's **political** agenda as one which will engage him in a return to writing in **pre-colonial languages** - a project they have little trouble invalidating. As they state,

In African countries and in India, that is in post-colonial countries where viable alternatives to english⁵ continue to exist, an appeal for a return to writing exclusively, or mainly in pre-colonial languages has been a recurring feature of calls for decolonization. Politically attractive as this is, it has been seen as problematic by those who insist on the syncretic nature of post-colonial societies. Syncretist critics argue that even a novel in Bengali

³ Ibid., p.28.

⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back (London: Routledge, 1989), p.203.

⁵ It is symptomatic that Ashcroft et al make a distinction between 'E'nglish for the British variety and 'e'nglish for all others. What this terminology does is devalue 'other' Englishes by giving the proper name to the British variety. It is this type of property and propriety that is questioned in the doctoral dissertation by Arjuna Parakrama entitled, "De-hegemonizing Language Standards: Learning from (Post) Colonial Englishes about "English", (University of Pittsburgh, 1990).

or Gikuyu is inevitably a cross-cultural hybrid, and that decolonizing projects must recognize this. Not to do so is to confuse decolonization with the reconstruction of pre-colonial reality.⁶

The concept of a pre-colonial language is indeed problematic. Language is not static and the colonial encounter undoubtedly marked all languages within the colonies, albeit in different ways, so that a pre-colonial language means a purist abstraction at best. The reality however is that nowhere in Decolonising the Mind does Ngugi announce a return to writing in pre-colonial languages. What seems to have taken place is that Ashcroft et al have created a simple dichotomy between indigenous languages and "(E)nglish", in which the former is traditional and pre-colonial and the latter is syncretic and hybrid and particularly suited to carry the colonial experience.

Where Ngugi and the authors of The Empire Writes Back do come together is in their emphasis on the subversive and revolutionary potential of the Kenyan peasant and post-colonial. For Ngugi, the re-articulation of identity is dominated by the fraught political agenda of decolonization which seeks to restore power to peasants and the underclass. As a result of this however, Ngugi borders on fetishizing the peasant culture in Kenya, and the Gikuyu in particular, for he does not discuss the complex ways in which peasant society has been transformed by the colonial encounter. For Ashcroft et. al, Salman Rushdie's phrase

⁶ Ashcroft et. al, The Empire Writes Back, p.30.

"The Empire Writes Back" is particularly appropriate to the post-colonial agenda. Elsewhere Helen Tiffin stated,

It is possible to consider all post-colonial literatures not as branches of the English literary tree, but as sites of resistance to it, and all that English and European texts represent. This writing back, this resistance, is not specifically directed against the text, but addresses the whole of the discursive field within which those texts were/are situated in colonialist discourse.⁷

This subversive and disruptive **potential** of marginalized works by writers like Soyinka, Walcott, Ngugi, Brathwaite, etc. point to a direction work needs to be taken in the future. As we have seen, the works of Soyinka and Walcott reflect the contradictions and fissures they themselves inhabit as post-colonials, and are constitutive of post-coloniality, and it is significant that a return to Gikuyu **has** to be for Ngugi, a political agenda and not a cultural one, for this would militate against his own identity as a colonized Kenyan educated in the colonial language - a history which cannot be wished away. The works of these post-colonial writers then enables us to lay bare the workings of colonial history, and their work can be used to study what is happening elsewhere. As Ashcroft et. al. stated,

The dialectics of self and Other,
indigene and exile, language and
place, slave and free, which is
the matrix of post-colonial litera-

⁷ Helen Tiffin, "Rites of Resistance: Counter-Discourse and West Indian Biography," Journal of West Indian Literature 3, no.1, January 1989. pp.29-30.

tures, is also an expression of the way in which language and power operate **in the world.**⁸

The potential for subverting hegemonic discourse may no longer be available to the Centre whose very privilege effaces the possibility of resistance. The violence done in the periphery by colonialism can and must be seen then as an enabling one that has the potential for creating new paradigms which **cannot be innocent** however of the fraught history of their production.

⁸ Ashcroft et al, The Empire Writes Back, p.173.

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